CELEBRATING FROM THANKSGIVING TO NEW YEAR'S

MARTHA STEWART

holiday sweets

100 RECIPES FOR THE SEASON

COOKIES, CANDIES, PIES, TARTS, CAKES, AND MORE!

DISPLAY UNTIL 1/4/10

0 70989 10154 8

$6.95 USA ($7.95 CAN)

marthastewart.com

CONTENTS holiday 2009

bake A PIE...8

build A HOUSE...18

update A CLASSIC...30

box up THE COOKIES...42

roll A YULE LOG...54

make A PUDDING...64

package THE CANDY...72

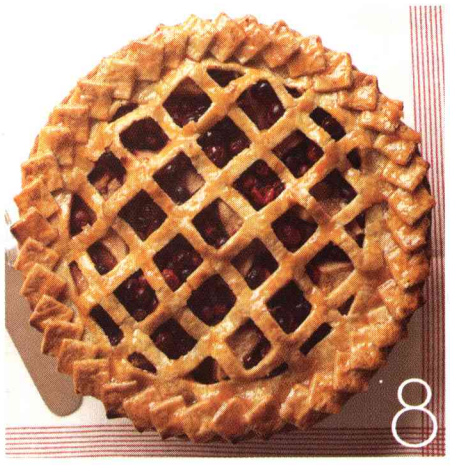
prepare A TART...80

surprise THE LITTLE ONES...90

create A FESTIVE FINALE...100

mix AND MATCH...112

WELCOME LETTER...2 TEMPLATES AND CLIP ART...116 GUIDE...120


8

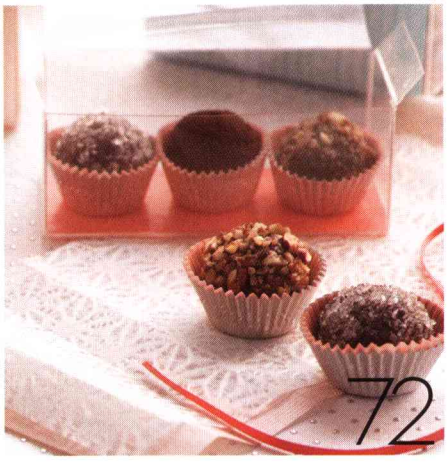
18

30

42

54

64


72

80

90

100

112

bake a pie

EVERYONE LOOKS FORWARD TO PIE, particularly on Thanksgiving Day. Family and friends eagerly anticipate the first bite, and bakers rejoice in one of the season's most rewarding and familiar rituals—the assembly. Consider the crust: Preparing the dough takes just minutes, and there's pleasure to be had in rolling it out and transforming a mere lump into a smooth, malleable round. Perhaps a plain pie shell is fine the rest of the year, but one that is crimped, latticed, or otherwise embellished feels more special. Take advantage of pie dough's good-freezing quality and dedicate a day early on to preparing it so all that's left to do is fill and bake (or, in some instances, bake and then fill). With their holiday flavors, the pies that follow will give everyone—including the cook—something to celebrate.

PEAR-CRANBERRY PIE

SEE RECIPE, PAGE 16

Crimson cranberries and sliced pears peek through a lattice crust created by cutting squares from rolled-out dough (rather than by weaving it in strips). When applied around the edge in a ring, the cutouts frame the pie beautifully.

LAURIE FRANKEL

SPICED APPLE PIE

SEE RECIPE, PAGE 16

Overlapping rounds of flaky dough in concentric circles make an unexpected top for a double-crust apple pie. The method takes more time but no special skill, and any undulations only enhance the ruffled look.

MATTHEW HRANEK

CHOCOLATE PECAN PIE

A holiday standby—pecan pie—becomes a standout when partnered with chocolate, in both the filling and the crust. Unsweetened whipped cream keeps the pie from being the least bit cloying.

CHOCOLATE PECAN PIE »

MAKES ONE 9-INCH PIE

- ⅔ cup sugar
- 1 cup light corn syrup
- 4 ounces semisweet chocolate, finely chopped
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
- All-purpose flour, for dusting
- Chocolate Pie Dough (recipe follows)
- 3 large eggs
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- 1½ cups pecans (about 6 ounces)
- Unsweetened whipped cream or crème fraîche, for serving
- Fresh or dried lavender, for garnish (optional)
- Vegetable-oil cooking spray

1. Bring sugar and corn syrup to a boil in a medium saucepan over medium-high heat, stirring to dissolve sugar; reduce heat to low, and simmer 2 minutes, stirring occasionally. Let cool completely (mixture will thicken).

2. In a heatproof bowl set over (not in) a pan of simmering water, heat half the chocolate with the butter until melted, stirring until smooth and combined. Let cool.

3. Preheat oven to 400°. On a lightly floured surface, roll out pie dough to a 13-inch round, about ⅛ inch thick. Lightly coat a 9-inch pie plate with cooking spray. Fit dough into pan; crimp edges as desired. Chill 30 minutes, or up to overnight.

4. In a large bowl, beat eggs until foamy. Add chocolate and corn-syrup mixtures, stirring to combine; stir in vanilla and pecans.

5. Pour filling into pie shell. Bake 20 minutes. Reduce oven to 350°; bake until filling has set, about 20 minutes more. Sprinkle with remaining chocolate; bake 5 minutes. Transfer to a wire rack to cool completely. Serve with whipped cream; garnish with lavender, if desired.

Chocolate Pie Dough

ENOUGH FOR ONE 9-INCH PIE

- 1¼ cups all-purpose flour
- ⅓ cup sugar
- 2 tablespoons unsweetened cocoa powder
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 6 tablespoons cold unsalted butter, cut into small pieces
- 3 large egg yolks, lightly beaten
- ½ teaspoon pure vanilla extract

Into a large bowl, sift together flour, sugar, cocoa, and salt. Rub in butter with your fingers until mixture is crumbly. Using a wooden spoon, stir together yolks and vanilla; add to flour mixture. With a fork, blend until mixture forms moist crumbs (do not overwork). Turn out dough onto a work surface; knead until smooth, about 1 minute. Form into a disk; wrap in plastic. Chill 30 minutes, or up to overnight. Dough can be frozen up to 1 month; thaw in the refrigerator before using.

CHOCOLATE CREAM PIE

MAKES ONE 8-INCH PIE

- 12 ounces (1 to 2 boxes) chocolate wafers, finely ground in a food processor
- 7 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted
- 1 teaspoon unflavored gelatin
- ½ cup milk
- 1 cup heavy cream
- ¾ cup plus 2 tablespoons sugar
- 8 ounces milk chocolate, finely chopped
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- 4 large egg whites

1. Mix together ground cookie crumbs and melted butter until evenly moistened. Press into an 8-inch springform pan, coating bottom and three-quarters of the way up sides. Cover with plastic wrap; chill 30 minutes.

2. Sprinkle gelatin over milk; let soften 5 minutes. Bring the cream and 2 tablespoons sugar to a boil in a small saucepan, stirring to dissolve sugar. Add gelatin mixture, and stir to combine. Remove from heat. Add chocolate and vanilla; cover, and let stand 3 minutes. Stir until thoroughly combined. Pass mixture through a fine sieve into prepared cookie crust; discard any unmelted chocolate. Chill until filling is set, about 6 hours or up to overnight.

3. Heat egg whites and remaining ¾ cup sugar in the heatproof bowl of an electric mixer set over (not in) a pan of simmering water, stirring until whites are warm to the touch and sugar is dissolved. Attach bowl to mixer; whisk on medium speed until soft peaks form. Raise speed to high, and beat until peaks are stiff and glossy but not dry.

4. Using a flexible spatula, top pie with meringue, lifting to create peaks. Use a small kitchen torch to brown meringue (or place under broiler, watching carefully, as it will brown quickly). Refrigerate until ready to serve, up to 1 day.

Of all desserts I think I prefer a slice of a delicious pie. I not only love eating pies, I love making the crusts, the fillings, and the toppings, and baking them to perfection.

—MARTHA

ACORN-SQUASH PIE

SEE RECIPE, PAGE 17

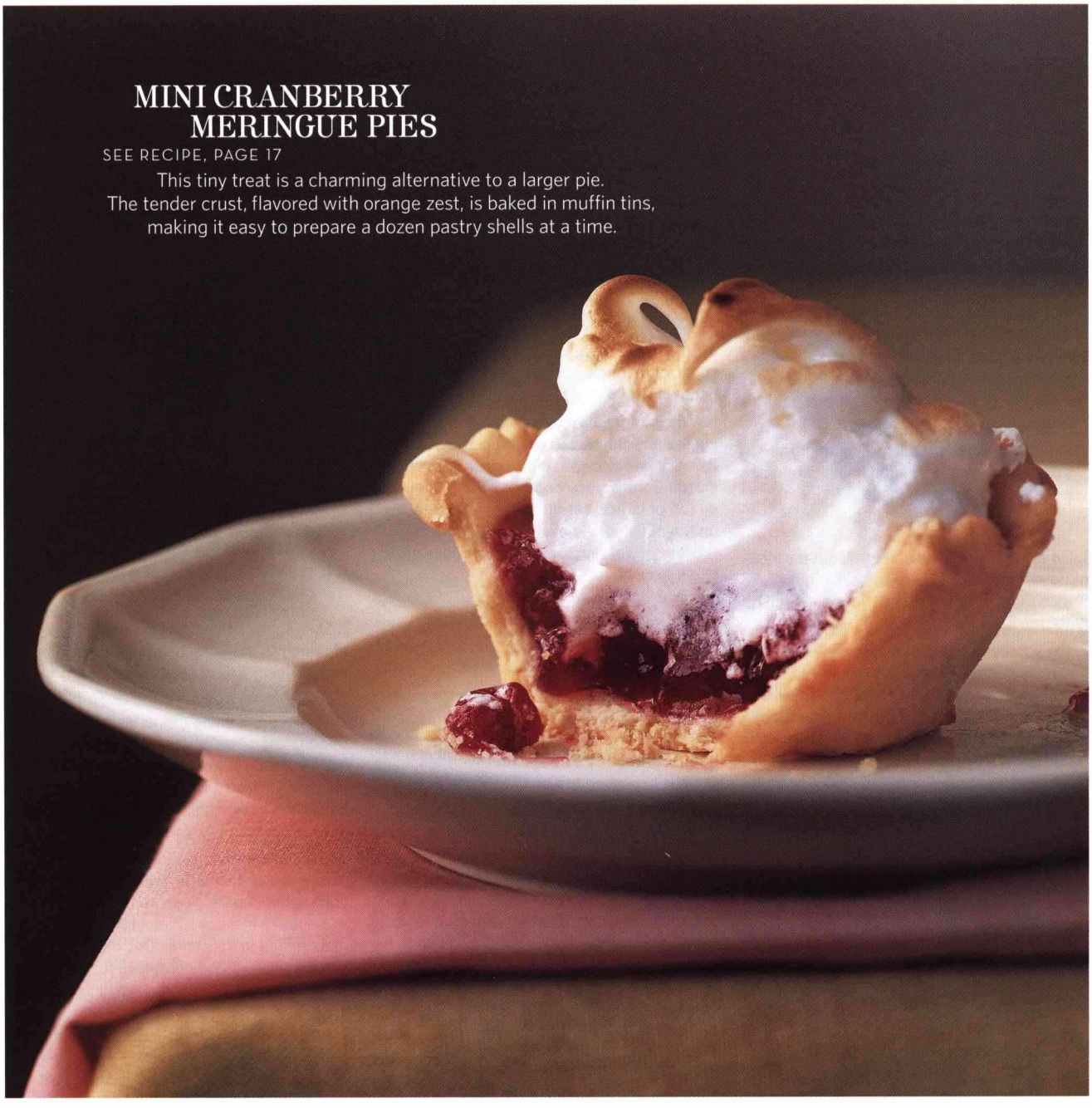
Squash and cornmeal are traditional ingredients in Thanksgiving cooking; here they appear in a delectable single-crust custard pie. The checkerboard border is easy to do—just snip the dough at even intervals and bend every other section back toward the center.

SHOOFLY PIE

SEE RECIPE, PAGE 15

Named for its tendency to attract sugar-loving pests, this Pennsylvania Dutch specialty is characterized by an enticing combination of buttery pie dough, rich molasses filling, and crumb topping that turns crisp and golden in the oven.

JONATHAN LOVEKIN



MINI CRANBERRY MERINGUE PIES

SEE RECIPE, PAGE 17

This tiny treat is a charming alternative to a larger pie. The tender crust, flavored with orange zest, is baked in muffin tins, making it easy to prepare a dozen pastry shells at a time.

« SHOOFLY PIE

MAKES ONE 9-INCH PIE

- 1 cup all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting
- ½ recipe Pâte Brisée (page 17)
- ½ cup packed light-brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
- ¼ teaspoon salt, plus a pinch
- 6 tablespoons cold unsalted butter, cut into small pieces
- 1 cup boiling water
- ½ cup unsulfured molasses
- ½ cup light corn syrup
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 large egg, lightly beaten

1. On a lightly floured surface, roll out dough to about ⅛ inch thick. Fit dough into a 9-inch pie plate; trim edges to leave a 1-inch overhang. Fold edges under, and crimp with your fingers. Chill 30 minutes, or up to overnight.

2. Preheat oven to 325°. Whisk together flour, brown sugar, cinnamon, nutmeg, and ¼ teaspoon salt in a bowl. Add butter, and rub mixture with your fingers until it forms fine crumbs.

3. Stir together the boiling water, molasses, and corn syrup in another bowl. Whisk in baking soda, egg, and remaining pinch of salt. Pour into pie shell. Scatter crumb topping over filling. Place pie on a rimmed baking sheet. Bake until filling is set and topping is deep golden brown, about 50 minutes. Transfer to a wire rack to cool 30 minutes. Serve warm.

bake a pie

PEAR-CRANBERRY PIE

MAKES ONE 9-INCH DOUBLE-CRUST PIE

All-purpose flour, for dusting
1 recipe Pâte Brisée (page 17)
4 ripe Bartlett pears (1¾ pounds; Bosc or Anjou can be substituted)
4⅓ cups fresh or frozen (thawed) cranberries (16 ounces)
⅔ cup packed dark-brown sugar
2 tablespoons cornstarch
1 teaspoon coarse salt
2 tablespoons cold unsalted butter, cut into small pieces
1 large egg yolk
1 tablespoon heavy cream
½ cup apricot preserves

1. On a lightly floured surface, roll out one disk of dough to about ⅛ inch thick. Fit into a 9-inch deep-dish pie plate; trim edges flush with rim. Chill 1 hour, or up to overnight.

2. On a piece of lightly floured parchment paper, roll out remaining disk of dough to ⅛ inch thick. Top with an inverted 9-inch pie plate, and gently press to make a light indentation (this will be your guide for cutting the lattice to fit the pie). Using a 1-inch square cutter, cut a lattice pattern out of the round, leaving at least ½ inch between cutouts and edge of round. Transfer squares to a parchment-lined baking sheet. To make partial squares where the lattice meets the rounded edge, make a very light indentation with the cutter, then cut out the portion of the square that is inside the round with a paring knife.

3. Using a paring knife or a pizza cutter, cut out the round, leaving an additional ½ inch of dough beyond marked circle. Reroll scraps; cut out as many additional squares as possible, and transfer to baking sheet. Transfer parchment with the lattice top to another baking sheet. Chill lattice and squares 1 hour.

4. Preheat oven to 375°, with racks in middle and lower positions. Peel and core pears. Very thinly slice 2 pears lengthwise; cut remaining 2 pears into 8 wedges each.

5. Toss together pears, cranberries, brown sugar, cornstarch, and salt. Pour into pie shell; gently press to make level. Dot with butter.

6. Whisk together egg yolk and cream for the egg wash; lightly brush over edge of pie shell. Remove lattice crust and squares from refrigerator. Gently place another baking sheet on top of lattice; carefully invert. Slide lattice on top of filling; remove parchment. Gently press edges of crust to seal; trim edges of lattice if necessary.

7. Lightly brush lattice with egg wash. Arrange dough squares around edge of pie, overlapping them slightly. Lightly brush top of each square with egg wash as you work.

8. Place a foil-lined baking sheet on lower oven rack to catch any juices. Bake pie on middle rack until crust is golden brown and juices are bubbling, about 1½ hours. Tent with foil if crust is browning too quickly. Transfer to a wire rack to cool 5 minutes.

9. Meanwhile, heat preserves in a saucepan over medium until warm. Puree in a food processor until smooth. Press through a fine sieve into a bowl or another saucepan; reheat if necessary. Brush warm pie with a generous amount of apricot glaze. Let cool completely on a wire rack.

SPICED APPLE PIE

MAKES ONE 9-INCH DOUBLE-CRUST PIE

¼ cup all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting
1 recipe Pâte Brisée (recipe follows)
4 pounds Granny Smith apples
1 tablespoon finely grated lemon zest plus 2 teaspoons fresh lemon juice
¾ cup packed light-brown sugar
¼ cup granulated sugar
1 teaspoon coarse salt
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1 teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
3 tablespoons cold unsalted butter, cut into small pieces
1 large egg yolk
1 tablespoon heavy cream
Fine sanding sugar, for sprinkling

1. On a lightly floured surface, roll out one disk of dough to about ⅛ inch thick. Fit into a 9-inch deep-dish pie plate. Trim edges flush with rim. Chill 1 hour, or up to overnight.

2. Roll out remaining disk of dough to ⅛ inch thick. Using a 1¾-inch fluted round cutter, cut out about 70 rounds, rerolling scraps if necessary. Place rounds on a parchment-lined baking sheet, and chill 30 minutes.

3. Peel and core apples. Thinly slice half; cut remaining apples into 1-inch pieces. Toss together apples, lemon zest and juice, brown and granulated sugars, flour, salt, cinnamon, and nutmeg in a bowl. Pour filling into pie shell, mounding it in the center. Dot with butter.

4. Whisk together egg yolk and cream for the egg wash; lightly brush over edge of crust. Arrange dough rounds over filling, working in

MAKING DECORATIVE CRUSTS

You will need a 1-inch square cutter for the pear-cranberry pie and a 1¾-inch fluted round cutter for the spiced apple pie.

PEAR-CRANBERRY PIE: After marking the dough with a 9-inch circle, begin cutting out squares, working from the center out to make even.

Before attaching the cutout squares, brush the edge of the lattice crust lightly with egg wash; do not use too much or it will pool around the rim.

Attach the squares in an overlapping pattern, brushing top of each with egg wash as you go to help them adhere to each other.

SPICED APPLE PIE: Attach fluted rounds in a spiral pattern, starting at outer edge and lightly brushing top of each with egg wash to help them adhere.

a spiral from the outside in to the center, overlapping them slightly and lightly brushing top of each round with egg wash. Lightly brush entire top of pie with egg wash, then sprinkle with sanding sugar. Chill 1 hour.

5. Preheat oven to 400°, with racks in middle and lower positions. Place a foil-lined baking sheet on lower rack to catch any juices. Bake pie on middle rack until crust begins to turn golden brown, about 25 minutes. Reduce oven to 375°, and bake until crust is golden brown and juices are bubbling, about 70 minutes more. Tent with foil if crust is browning too quickly. Transfer to a wire rack to cool completely.

Pâte Brisée

MAKES ENOUGH FOR ONE 9- OR 10-INCH DOUBLE-CRUST PIE

- 3 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1 cup (2 sticks) plus 2 tablespoons cold unsalted butter, cut into small pieces
- ¼ to ½ cup ice water

Pulse flour, salt, and sugar in a food processor to combine. Add butter; pulse until mixture resembles coarse crumbs with some larger pieces remaining, about 10 seconds. Evenly drizzle ¼ cup ice water over mixture. Pulse until mixture just begins to hold together (it should not be wet or sticky). If dough is too dry, add more water, 1 tablespoon at a time, and pulse to combine. Divide dough in half. Wrap each in plastic; shape into disks. Refrigerate 1 hour, or up to overnight; freeze up to 1 month (thaw before using).

ACORN-SQUASH PIE

MAKES ONE 10-INCH PIE

- 3 small acorn squash (about 3 pounds)
- 1½ cups all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting
- ½ cup yellow cornmeal, preferably stone ground
- ½ cup sugar
- 2 teaspoons salt
- ½ cup (1 stick) cold unsalted butter, cut into small pieces
- 4 large whole eggs, lightly beaten, plus 3 egg yolks
- 3 to 4 tablespoons ice water
- ¾ cup honey
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ¾ teaspoon ground ginger
- ½ cup plus 1 tablespoon milk
- Vegetable-oil cooking spray

1. Halve squash lengthwise; remove seeds. In a large pot fitted with a steamer basket (or colander), bring 1 inch of water to a boil. Place squash in basket; cover and steam until tender, 20 to 30 minutes.

2. In a large bowl, whisk together flour, cornmeal, sugar, and 1 teaspoon salt. Rub in butter with your fingers until mixture is crumbly. Lightly beat 2 egg yolks with 3 tablespoons ice water; pour into flour mixture and, with a fork, mix quickly to combine. Knead lightly in bowl until dough just holds together, adding up to 1 tablespoon additional ice water if mixture is too crumbly. Shape into a disk, and wrap in plastic. Chill 1 hour, or up to overnight.

3. Meanwhile, scrape flesh from cooled squash, and puree in a food processor until smooth. Add honey, cinnamon, ginger, and remaining teaspoon salt, then add eggs and ½ cup milk. Pulse until thoroughly combined.

4. On a lightly floured surface, roll out dough to about ⅛ inch thick. Lightly coat a 9-inch pie plate with cooking spray. Fit dough into pan, trimming edges flush with rim. To make a checkerboard edge, cut edge of dough ½ inch deep at ¾-inch intervals; bend every other section back over filling. Whisk together remaining egg yolk and tablespoon milk for the egg wash; lightly brush over edge of crust. Chill 1 hour.

5. Preheat oven to 425°, with rack in lowest position. Pour filling into pie shell. Bake 10 minutes. Reduce oven to 350°, and continue to bake 30 to 40 minutes more, or until filling is barely set (it will continue to firm as it cools). If crust is browning too quickly, cover with a ring of aluminum foil. Transfer to a wire rack to cool. Serve warm, at room temperature, or cold. Pie can be made up to 2 days ahead; let cool completely before refrigerating, covered, up to 2 days. (Filling will separate from crust as it cools.)

MINI CRANBERRY MERINGUE PIES

MAKES 12

If you can't find blood oranges, use regular oranges for the zest and juice.

- All-purpose flour, for dusting
- 1 recipe Pâte Sucrée, Citrus Variation (recipe follows)
- 3¼ cups fresh or frozen (thawed) cranberries (12 ounces)
- 1½ cups sugar
- 1¾ cups water, plus more as needed
- 1½ teaspoons finely chopped lemon zest
- 1 teaspoon finely chopped blood orange zest, plus ¼ cup blood orange juice
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ⅛ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- Pinch of ground cloves
- 3 tablespoons cornstarch
- 3 large egg whites
- Pinch of cream of tartar

1. Preheat oven to 375°. On a lightly floured surface, roll out dough to about ⅛ inch thick. With a 4⅛-inch fluted biscuit cutter, cut out twelve rounds; fit into 12 cups of a standard muffin tin (not nonstick). Prick all over bottoms of dough with a fork. Chill 30 minutes.

2. Line each shell with parchment paper, and fill with pie weights or dried beans. Bake until lightly golden around edges, about 15 minutes. Remove parchment and weights. Return to oven; bake until centers are just turning golden, about 5 minutes more. Transfer to wire racks to cool 5 minutes. Remove shells from tins; let cool completely.

3. Bring 2 cups cranberries, 1 cup sugar, and 1½ cups water to a boil in a medium saucepan. Reduce heat; simmer, stirring occasionally, until cranberries have burst, about 5 minutes. Pass through a coarse sieve, then a fine sieve; discard solids. (You should have about 1¾ cups juice; if you have less, add more water.)

4. Bring strained cranberry juice, ¼ cup sugar, the zests, salt, cinnamon, cloves, and remaining 1¼ cups cranberries to a boil in a medium saucepan, stirring occasionally. Reduce heat; simmer, stirring occasionally, until cranberries are soft but have not burst, about 3 minutes.

5. Stir together cornstarch, blood orange juice, and remaining ¼ cup water; whisk into cranberry mixture. Bring to a boil, stirring constantly. Cook, stirring, until translucent, about 1 minute. Divide among pie shells. Chill until set, about 1 hour, or up to overnight.

6. Put egg whites and remaining ¼ cup sugar in the heatproof bowl of an electric mixer set over (not in) a pan of simmering water; whisk until whites are warm to the touch and sugar has dissolved. Attach to mixer; whisk on medium speed until foamy. Raise speed to high. Add cream of tartar; beat until medium-stiff, glossy peaks form (do not overbeat). Using a small spatula, divide meringue among pies, lifting to create peaks.

7. Use a small kitchen torch to brown tops of peaks (or place under broiler, watching carefully, as meringue will brown quickly).

Pâte Sucrée

MAKES ENOUGH FOR 12 MINI PIES OR ONE 9- OR 11-INCH TART

- 1¼ cups all-purpose flour
- 4½ teaspoons sugar
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ cup (1 stick) cold unsalted butter, cut into small pieces
- 1 large egg yolk, lightly beaten
- 2 tablespoons ice water, plus more if needed

Pulse flour, sugar, and salt in a food processor to combine. Add butter; process until mixture resembles coarse crumbs with some larger pieces remaining, about 10 seconds. Add egg yolk; pulse to combine. With machine running, add ice water in a slow, steady stream through feed tube until dough just holds together (no longer than 30 seconds). Turn out onto a work surface. Shape into a disk. Wrap in plastic; chill 1 hour, or up to overnight, or freeze up to 1 month (thaw before using).

Citrus Variation:

Follow above recipe, adding 1 teaspoon grated orange (blood or regular) zest and ½ teaspoon grated lemon zest to flour mixture.

build a house

WITH THEIR FAIRY-TALE ORIGINS AND enchanting scale, gingerbread houses appeal to all ages. Here you'll find everything you need to create a confectionery dwelling-in-miniature (even if you've never attempted to construct one before), including templates and assembly instructions with step-by-step photos. It all begins with a foolproof recipe for gingerbread-cookie dough that's hardy enough to be cut neatly and, once baked and assembled, will hold up well over time. (The same dough can be used to produce wonderfully crisp, subtly spiced cookies that are a joy to eat.) The gingerbread-cake (yes, cake!) cabin on page 22 is sure to dazzle: Unlike the cookie-based houses, it doubles as a delicious dessert.

SWEDISH GINGERBREAD HOUSE

SEE RECIPE, PAGE 24

Sweet details like piped icicles, boughs of greenery, and a cinnamon-stick woodpile lend realistic charm to a simple cottage. A light dusting of confectioners' sugar mimics freshly fallen snow.

MAKE-YOUR-OWN-HOUSE CONTEST!
MARTHASTEWART.COM/GINGERBREAD-CONTEST

SNOW-SWEPT GINGERBREAD COTTAGE

SEE RECIPE, PAGE 24

The caramelized-syrup windows of this colonial house are lit from within by a string of holiday bulbs, which flicker and glow like firelight. Intricate piped-icing details reflect the home's period; cookie trees and evergreen shrubbery (plus a tiny wreath) complete the scene.

GINGERBREAD FACADE

SEE RECIPE, PAGE 24

For the look of a gingerbread house without the three-dimensional construction, make a facade instead. This one is based on a photograph of the house in which it is displayed (see how-to, page 25). Two supports, cut from gingerbread and attached at the back, keep it upright.

GINGERBREAD-CAKE HOUSE

SEE RECIPE, PAGE 28

Part with tradition by making an entirely edible house using moist gingerbread cake, chocolate buttercream frosting, and a cookie-tile roof. Pathways formed of cookie "stones" lead to the front door and to a doghouse; the fondant snowman seems freshly made from the snow-covered lawn. Cookie shingles soften on the cake, making it easy to slice to reveal the dark, delectable interior.

Whether creating a tiny cottage or an elaborate mansion, gingerbread houses endear you to the season like no other project. —MARTHA

build a house

SWEDISH GINGERBREAD HOUSE

MAKES ONE HOUSE

Use the templates on pages 116 and 117 to make the house and chimney pieces, as directed. Cut out two 6½-by-7½-inch pieces of dough for the roof. Use a cookie cutter to cut out a tree, if desired.

All purpose flour, for dusting
Molasses-Gingerbread Cookie Dough (recipe follows)
Caramel Syrup (recipe follows)
Royal Icing (recipe follows)
Confectioners' sugar, for dusting

1. Preheat oven to 350°. On a lightly floured surface, roll out gingerbread dough to about ⅛ inch thick. Chill until firm, about 1 hour. Lightly dust top of dough with flour. Place templates on top and cut out shapes with a paring knife. (Use a small utility knife to cut out the windows.) Cut out roof pieces (and tree, if desired). Transfer shapes to parchment-lined baking sheets. Bake, rotating sheets halfway through, until just beginning to brown, about 15 minutes. Let cool completely.

2. Make caramel syrup, and assemble house (see how-to, pages 26–27).

3. Place royal icing in a pastry bag fitted with a medium plain tip (#5 or #6). Pipe to outline windows, doorway, and edges of chimney, including top and base. Outline the four joining points of house, sides, and top of roof. Decorate roof: Starting at the top, pipe a horizontal line of icing in a scallop pattern, making curves in even intervals; pipe another scalloped line so the peaks join the scallops above them in the middle. Pipe icicles around edges. Dust roof with confectioners' sugar.

Molasses-Gingerbread Cookie Dough

MAKES ENOUGH FOR ONE HOUSE, PLUS EMBELLISHMENTS

1¼ cups packed dark-brown sugar
¾ cup unsulfured molasses
½ cup (1 stick) unsalted butter
1 tablespoon ground cinnamon
1 tablespoon ground ginger
½ teaspoon coarse salt
1¼ cups milk
1 tablespoon baking powder
6½ cups all-purpose flour

1. Combine brown sugar, molasses, butter, spices, and salt in a medium saucepan over low heat, stirring with a wooden spoon, until sugar is dissolved, about 10 minutes. Stir in milk. Remove from heat, and let cool.

2. Pour milk mixture into a mixing bowl; add baking powder and flour. With an electric mixer, and beginning on low speed and increasing to medium, beat until well combined. Divide dough in half; shape into disks. Wrap in plastic, and refrigerate overnight. Dough can be frozen up to 1 month; thaw in the refrigerator before using.

Caramel Syrup

MAKES 1 CUP

1⅓ cups sugar
¾ cup water

Bring sugar and water to a boil in a saucepan. Reduce heat; simmer until thickened and light brown, about 10 minutes. Use immediately.

Royal Icing

MAKES ABOUT 5 CUPS

2 pounds confectioners' sugar, sifted
½ cup plus 2 tablespoons meringue powder (see the Guide)
Scant 1 cup water, plus more if needed

1. With an electric mixer on low speed, beat ingredients until fluffy, 7 to 8 minutes. Use immediately, or transfer to an airtight container and refrigerate up to 1 week. Stir well with a flexible spatula before using.

2. Thin icing as needed by stirring in additional water, a teaspoon at a time. For piping designs, add just enough water that icing is no longer stiff; for floodwork, add water until icing is the consistency of honey.

GINGERBREAD FACADE

MAKES ONE FACADE

You will need molding clay (see the Guide) to make windowpanes. Use windowpanes as soon as possible after making them; if stored, they become impossible to work with. Make the caramel syrup once the molds are ready.

Molasses-Gingerbread Cookie Dough (recipe above)
All-purpose flour, for dusting
Royal Icing (recipe above)
1 large egg white lightly beaten with 1 tablespoon water, for egg wash
White nonpareils or sanding sugar
Caramel Syrup (recipe above)

1. Make template (see step 1 of how-to, opposite).

2. Preheat oven to 350°. Roll out gingerbread dough on a Silpat to about ¼ inch thick. Chill until firm, about 1 hour. Lightly dust top of dough with flour. Place templates on top and cut out shapes (see step 2 of how-to, opposite; also cut out shutters and supports). Place Silpat with house pieces on a baking sheet. Bake, rotating sheet halfway through, until just beginning to brown, about 18 minutes. Let cool completely.

3. Place template over baked gingerbread. Using a utility knife, lightly score along roof lines, shingles, and door (to serve as guides when piping). Gingerbread can be stored on baking sheets, covered with plastic wrap, up to 1 week at room temperature.

4. Decorate facade (see step 3 of how-to, opposite). Decorate shutters as desired.

5. Make windowpane molds: Roll out molding clay ¼ inch thick on a Silpat. Measure windows of house; add ½ inch all around. With a utility knife, cut out molds from clay using measurements. Make the caramel syrup, and pour into molds (see step 4 of how-to, opposite). Let set, then use royal icing to glue onto back of facade (see step 5 of how-to, opposite).

6. Lightly brush some un-iced areas of gingerbread with egg wash; liberally sprinkle nonpareils or sanding sugar over top. (Work quickly, as egg white dries rapidly.) Let sit 20 minutes, then brush off any excess.

7. Attach the shutters (see step 6 of how-to, opposite). Once the shutters are set, attach supports for the house to either end: Pipe icing along the angled edge of support, using a small plain tip (#3). Hold support, narrow end up, flush against one side of the house until set. Repeat on the other side of the house.

SNOW-SWEPT GINGERBREAD COTTAGE

MAKES ONE HOUSE

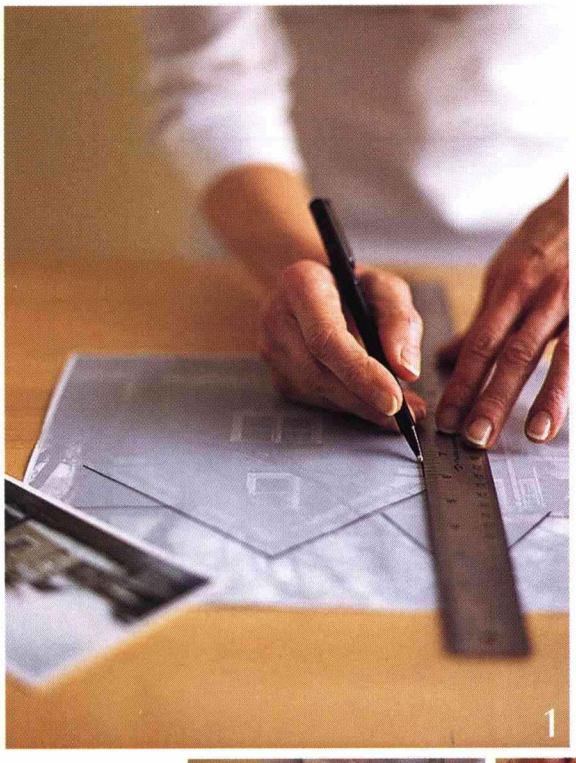
Use the templates on page 118 to make the house and chimney pieces, as directed. Cut out two 10⅝-by-5⅜-inch pieces of dough for the roof. You will need to make your own templates for the Christmas trees, or use a tree-shaped cookie cutter. Once baked and cooled, cut each cookie in half lengthwise. To form each three-dimensional tree, dip cut edge of four halves in syrup, then join together at 45-degree angles, pressing firmly to secure.

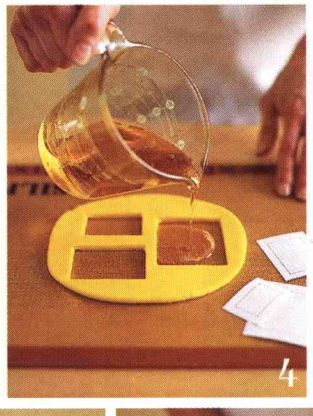
All-purpose flour, for dusting
Molasses-Gingerbread Cookie Dough (recipe above)
Royal Icing (recipe above)
Clear rock candy
Caramel Syrup (recipe above)
Sanding sugar

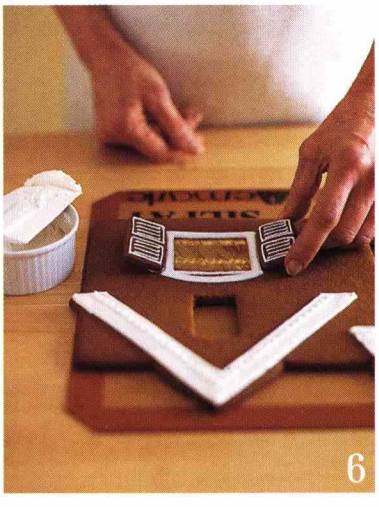
1. Preheat oven to 350°. On a lightly floured surface, roll out gingerbread dough to about ⅛ inch thick. Chill until firm, about 1 hour. Lightly dust top of dough with flour. Place templates on top, and cut out shapes with a paring knife. (Use a small utility knife to cut out the windows.) Cut out roof pieces (and trees, if desired). Transfer to parchment-lined baking sheets. Bake, rotating sheets halfway through, until just beginning to brown, about 15 minutes. Let cool completely.

continued on page 28

creating the facade







1. Using a photocopier, enlarge to desired size the photograph or drawing of the building you would like to render in gingerbread. (Make sure rendering will fit on your largest baking sheet.) Place a sheet of tracing paper over enlarged image; trace it. Be sure to include all the exterior details and features of the house—doors, windows, eaves, shutters, shingles—so you can outline with icing later. Copy the tracing onto a sheet of card stock to make a template; cut it out. To make the supports, enlarge template to the height of the facade. Trace onto card stock; cut out.

2. Place facade template over chilled dough; cut out with a paring knife. Remove excess dough from around template (reserve). Cut out windows from facade with a small utility knife. Gather together and roll out scraps of dough; cut out two shutters and two supports. Bake and cool as directed in recipe.

3. Using a pastry bag fitted with a small plain tip (#2), pipe icing to outline any areas you wish to cover completely, such as eaves or turrets (use scored lines as guides); let set 5 to 10 minutes. While it sets, "draw" shingles by piping along scored lines, using the same tip. Then, with a pastry bag fitted with another small plain tip (#3), draw tight zigzags within the outlined areas to fill in (this is known as flooding). While icing is still wet, spread evenly with an offset spatula. When icing is dry, use the #2 tip to pipe decorative lines on flooded areas.

4. Make caramel syrup; immediately pour it into the molds. Let set in molds until completely dry, about 1 hour. Carefully lift clay, leaving windowpanes behind.

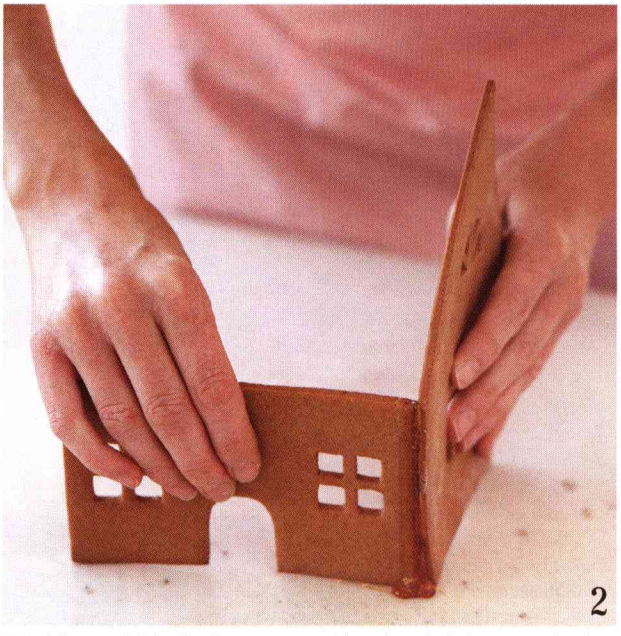
5. Turn facade over so you can work from the back. "Glue" panes into window frames: Outline back of frame with icing by piping a line ¼ inch from edge of frame. Press "glass" into place. Let icing dry completely, about 1 hour. Turn house right side up. Embellish windows with icing, if desired.

6. To attach shutters, pipe a very thick line of icing along the edges of the windows. While still wet, attach shutters at a slight angle. If necessary, prop up shutters with a ½-inch piece of toothpick or crumpled paper towel to hold them slightly away from front of house as the icing dries.

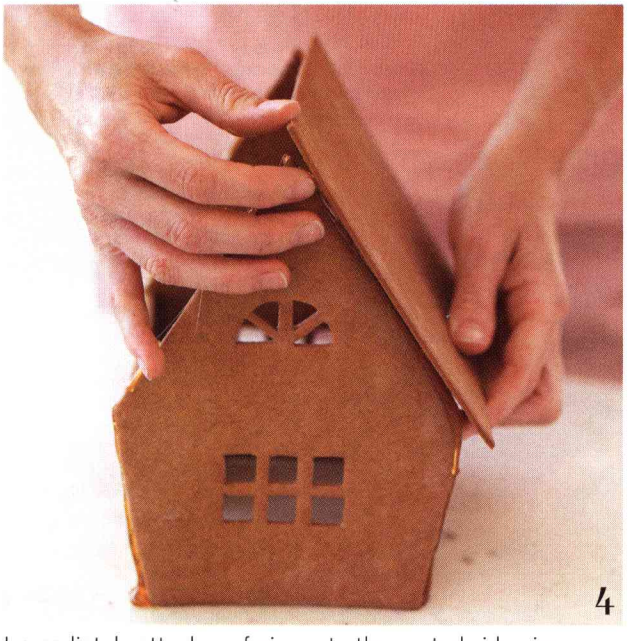
assembling the cottage

Follow these steps to build the Swedish Gingerbread House on page 19. You can also apply the basic methods to construct other houses, including the Snow-Swept Gingerbread Cottage on page 21.

Once you've rolled, cut, and baked a cookie house's walls, roof, and other details, a caramel syrup serves as the "glue." To assemble: Dip one short edge of front piece in caramel, and allow excess to drip off. Coat only the edge that will be joined.



Working quickly (before caramel hardens), join coated edge of front piece to a side piece, forming a corner; press firmly to adhere. Repeat with remaining side piece. Dip both short edges of back piece in caramel; attach to side pieces.



Immediately attach roof pieces to the coated side pieces, making sure they are centered and evenly aligned.

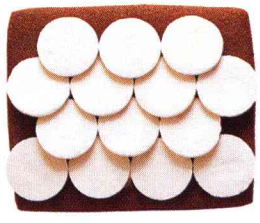
To construct the chimney, brush edge of each piece with caramel, one at a time, then join together, pressing firmly and holding over pan to allow excess to drip off.

Once the four walls are attached, quickly brush caramel over exposed edges of both side pieces. (If caramel in pan begins to harden at any time, warm briefly on the stove.)

Dip angled end of chimney in caramel, then attach to roof, holding it firmly in place until secure. Attach door by dipping one edge in caramel and affixing to opening on one side, so door is ajar, holding it firmly in place until secure.

DECORATIVE DETAILS FOR GINGERBREAD HOUSES

Use the following materials and techniques to embellish any gingerbread house. Before piping icing onto the gingerbread, use a utility knife to lightly score lines or patterns. For where to find the candies used below, see the Guide.



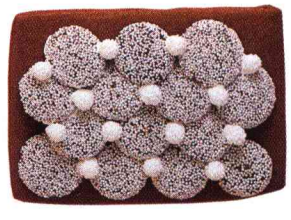
ROUND-SHINGLED ROOF
Round white candy wafers applied in an overlapping pattern simulate rooftop shingles. Pipe a dab of icing onto the back of each wafer and work in rows, beginning at the bottom and working your way up, overlapping slightly as you go.

TRIANGULAR ROOF PATTERN
Using a pastry bag and a small plain tip (#2), pipe a series of horizontal lines across the roof. Pipe triangles that connect the lines, leaving open triangles in between. Sprinkle sanding sugar over wet icing to add sparkly detail. Let dry; brush off excess.

SNOW-COVERED ICICLES
Using a pastry bag and a medium plain tip (#4), pipe a thick line of icing across the top. Pipe icing into icicle shapes below line. Sprinkle with sanding sugar while "icicles" are still wet. Let dry; brush off excess.

SCALLOP-PATTERNED ROOF WITH SNOW
Use a pastry bag and a small plain tip (#2) to pipe curved lines from top to bottom. Pipe horizontal lines in a scallop pattern, using a larger tip (#4) for bottom line and #2 for top. Sprinkle with sanding sugar.

BRICK SURFACE
Pillow candies are "glued" with icing into horizontal rows to simulate bricks. (White candies were used here, but you can use other colors.) Candy-coated pieces of chewing gum produce a similar effect.



SHINGLED ROOF WITH SNOWBALLS
Make a round-shingled roof with chocolate nonpareil candies. "Glue" them in place with icing, overlapping slightly; attach ball candies between nonpareils as another decorative element.

2. Working with one piece at a time, frost chimney shapes with royal icing; sprinkle with rock candy while still wet (leave all but top part of "back" piece free for attaching to house). Set aside to dry.

3. To make windows, line a baking sheet with a Silpat. Make caramel syrup. Place a gingerbread section on prepared sheet, exposed side down; pour caramel syrup into window spaces. Let syrup cool and harden on baking sheet before turning over and decorating.

4. Using a pastry bag fitted with a fine plain tip (#1), pipe royal icing around windows and doors and down side edges of house. While icing is still wet, sprinkle with sanding sugar. Gently shake off excess sugar, and let dry.

5. Pipe windowpanes, door-frame details, and Christmas-tree edging with the #1 tip. Switch to an open-star tip (#16) to accent the corners of the windows and doors.

6. When decorations have dried, assemble house, roof, and chimney pieces, following the instructions on pages 26–27. When assembling chimney, attach two side pieces to "front" at the base, then attach sloped sides; finish with top two side pieces. Brush edges at top of assembled chimney with caramel; secure top piece in place. To attach chimney, pipe icing on back piece; quickly press onto house, holding firmly until set. Use the #16 tip to create shingle pattern on roof and eaves.

GINGERBREAD-CAKE HOUSE

SERVES 10 TO 12

For where to find the cutters and other tools, see the Guide.

- All-purpose flour, for dusting
- Molasses-Gingerbread Cookie Dough (page 24)
- Royal Icing (page 24)
- Sanding Sugar
- Gingerbread Cakes (recipe follows)
- Chocolate Buttercream (recipe follows)
- Melted chocolate, for trees
- Cornstarch, for dusting
- Fondant (see the Guide)
- Orange and red gel-paste food coloring, for snowmen
- Black licorice and chocolate sprinkles, for snowmen

1. Make cookie decorations: Preheat oven to 350°. On a lightly floured surface, roll out gingerbread dough to slightly thicker than ⅛ inch thick. Chill until firm, about 1 hour. Cut out shapes (see how-to, below left), using fluted square cookie cutters and a fluted pastry wheel. Transfer to parchment-lined baking sheets; chill 30 minutes. Make decorative holes with a skewer, as shown.

2. Bake, rotating sheets halfway through, until just beginning to brown, about 12 minutes. Transfer on parchment to a wire rack to cool completely.

3. Decorate window and door pieces (see how-to, below right). Let icing dry at least 3 hours before assembling house.

4. Construct the gingerbread-cake house and make embellishments (see how-to, opposite).

Gingerbread Cakes

MAKES TWO 9-INCH CAKES

The cakes can be baked up to two days ahead; let cool completely, then refrigerate wrapped well in plastic.

- 10 tablespoons (1¼ sticks) unsalted butter, softened, plus more for pans
- 3¾ cups all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting
- 1½ teaspoons baking soda
- 1½ cups boiling water
- 4 teaspoons ground ginger
- 2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
- ¾ teaspoon ground cloves
- ¾ teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- 1 cup packed dark-brown sugar
- 1½ cups unsulfured molasses
- 3 large eggs, room temperature

1. Preheat oven to 350°. Butter two 9-inch square pans; line with bottoms with parchment. Butter parchment and dust pans with flour; tap out excess.

2. Stir together baking soda and the boiling water. In a medium bowl, whisk together flour, spices, salt, and baking powder.

3. With an electric mixer on medium speed, cream butter and brown sugar until pale and fluffy. Add molasses and eggs, and beat until creamy, about 4 minutes, scraping down sides of bowl as needed. Reduce speed to low. Add flour mixture in three batches, alternating with two batches of the baking-soda mixture; beat until incorporated. Raise speed to high; mix until all ingredients are well combined, about 15 seconds. Stir batter several times with a flexible spatula, scraping across bottom of bowl, to ensure it is completely smooth.

4. Divide batter between prepared pans. Bake until a cake tester inserted into centers comes out clean, about 40 minutes (do not open oven door before 35 minutes of baking). Transfer pans to wire racks to cool 20 minutes. Run a sharp knife around sides of cakes, then invert onto racks. Peel off parchment. Let cool completely.

Chocolate Buttercream

MAKES 5½ CUPS

The buttercream can be refrigerated up to three days in an airtight container. Bring to room temperature, and beat on low speed until smooth.

- 6 ounces semisweet chocolate, finely chopped
- 1½ cups sugar
- 6 large egg whites (or 6 ounces whipping-quality pasteurized egg whites; see below)
- 1 pound (4 sticks) unsalted butter, cut into tablespoons, softened
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

1. Melt chocolate in a heatproof bowl set over (not in) a pan of simmering water, stirring until smooth. Let cool.

2. Combine sugar and egg whites in a heatproof bowl of an electric mixer set over (not in) a pan of simmering water; whisk until sugar is dissolved, about 5 minutes.

3. Attach bowl to mixer with the whisk attachment. Beat on medium speed until stiff peaks form and mixture is completely cooled, about 10 minutes.

4. Switch to the paddle attachment. Add butter, a few tablespoons at a time, beating until combined before each addition. Reduce speed to low; add vanilla and melted chocolate. Beat until mixture is smooth, about 5 minutes.

NOTE: *If serving to pregnant women, babies, young children, the elderly, or anyone whose health is compromised, use pasteurized egg whites instead of separating the eggs yourself.*

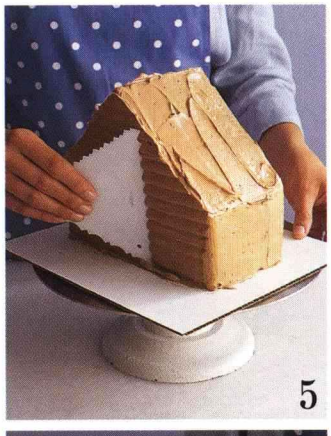
FORM COOKIE SHAPES

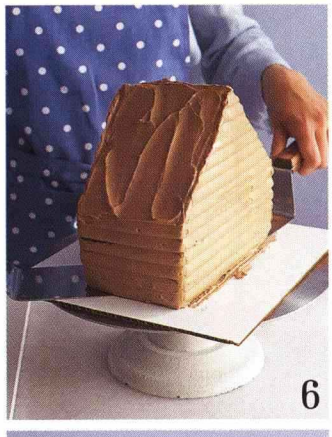
Using a 1¼-inch fluted square cookie cutter, cut out 80 pieces for roof, walkway, and small window; use a 1½-inch fluted square cutter to make two pieces for large windows. Using a fluted pastry wheel, cut out eight pieces for trim (9 by ½ inch each), a 3-by-2-inch door, two squares (2 inches each) for doghouse roof, and a 1-inch arched door for doghouse. Refrigerate 30 minutes on lined baking sheets, then use a wooden skewer to make holes along edges of trim, doors, and windows.

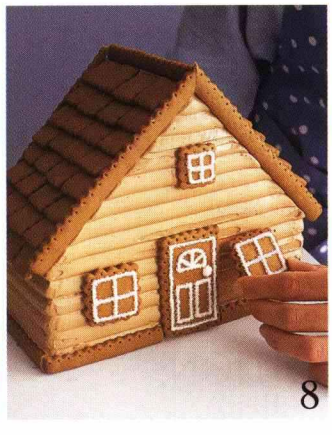
PIPE DETAILS

Decorate baked, cooled window and door pieces: Fill a pastry bag fitted with a small plain tip (#2) with royal icing, and use it to draw details onto cookie pieces, as desired. While icing is still wet, sprinkle with sanding sugar, and gently tap off excess. Allow the icing designs to dry before attaching cookies to house.

assembling the gingerbread-cake house







CONSTRUCT HOUSE

1. Start with two square gingerbread cakes. Cut one cake, on the diagonal, into four triangles; halve the other cake to make two rectangles.

2. Place one rectangle on a cake board or plate; frost top. Stack the other on top; frost.

3. On a flat work surface, stack three triangles, spreading frosting between the layers. Set the stacked "roof" on the cake as shown, then refrigerate, covered, 15 minutes.

FROST EXTERIOR

4. Apply a thin "crumb coat" of frosting, which seals in stray crumbs and ensures a smooth surface; refrigerate cake 20 minutes to set.

5. Frost house with another, thicker layer of buttercream, smoothing sides and front. Make a log pattern by running a decorating comb with a scalloped edge along the front, back, and sides.

6. Using two large spatulas, transfer cake to a serving platter; refrigerate until ready to decorate.

ADD DETAILS

7. Press fluted trim onto roof edges, cutting with a paring knife as needed and matching up corners. Press shingles onto roof, starting at the bottom and overlapping slightly as you work your way up. Place trim on top of roof.

8. Add door and windows. Cut remaining trim pieces to fit bottom edges of house; press into place.

9. Refrigerate cake at least 20 minutes, or up to 5 hours. Just before serving, pipe royal icing "icicles," using a pastry bag fitted with a small plain tip (#3), around roof edge.

MAKE EMBELLISHMENTS

DOGHOUSE: Cut doghouse shape from extra cake triangle (near right). Frost and comb; add cookie roof and door as instructed above.

TREES: With a small brush, coat clean tree branches with melted chocolate (middle). Place on parchment; chill to set.

SNOWMEN: On a cornstarch-dusted surface, roll balls of white fondant to form snowmen (far right), gluing together balls with royal icing, if needed. Use food coloring to tint a tiny bit of fondant orange; shape into carrot noses. Tint a small amount red; roll out very thin and shape into scarves. Make toothpick holes for noses, eyes, and buttons; insert carrots and sprinkles. Add scarves; top with licorice hats.

update a classic

'TIS THE SEASON TO HONOR TRADITION, but that doesn't mean you have to follow it to a T. Instead, tweak familiar desserts to create something new and unexpected. With such merrymaking in mind, transform a Thanksgiving standard into individual tarts with a surprising twist (hint: the "filling" is actually pumpkin-flavored flan), or chocolate mousse into exquisite celebratory cakes. Other favorites are turned upside down or inside out, and eggnog is served in the guise of a "pie" in a cup. Sometimes it's just a matter of swapping out the flavors with seasonal specialties; for example, gingerbread is put to good use in the linzertorte on page 33. Even the staunchest holiday purist will find it impossible to resist these inspired interpretations of the classics.

GINGERBREAD ICEBOX CAKE

SEE RECIPE, PAGE 38

A stunning icebox cake is one part nostalgia, one (big) part ultramodern. Homemade gingerbread cookies stand in for the store-bought chocolate wafers in the well-known version, and are arranged in freestanding circles rather than in a loaf shape. A sweet-tart citrus topping provides another novel spin.

PUMPKIN FLAN IN PASTRY SHELL

SEE RECIPE, PAGE 38

A signature pie is reinvented as dressed-up little desserts. To make them, chill spiced pumpkin flans in their baking dishes, then invert into prebaked tart shells.

GINGERBREAD LINZERTORTE

SEE RECIPE, PAGE 39

This enticing variation of the popular Austrian dessert features a gingerbread crust instead of the usual nut-rich one, but keeps the raspberry-jam filling. As a holiday-worthy alternative to the customary crisscross strips of pastry, snowflake and dot shapes are cut out from the top.

INSIDE-OUT BLACK FOREST CAKE

SEE RECIPE, PAGE 39

A Bavarian classic, Black Forest cake is usually generously frosted with whipped cream and garnished with chocolate shavings so the flavors are concealed. Here there's no guesswork involved: Each delicious component—moist chocolate cake, silky pastry cream, and kirsch-soaked sour cherries—is delightfully apparent. A slick of shiny chocolate ganache graces the top.

It's so much fun to give a tried-and-true dessert an unexpected twist. By swapping out ingredients or using a different pan, you can create new "classics." –MARTHA

TRIPLE-CHOCOLATE MOUSSE CAKES

SEE RECIPE, PAGE 39

Instead of being spooned into a glass, mousses made with two types of chocolate—bittersweet and milk—are piped onto a third layer of chocolate (in this case, a dark-chocolate cake baked in a ramekin). Each serving is garnished with a simple chocolate curl, easily made with a vegetable peeler.

EGGNOG CUPS

The same kind of cup used for the beloved Christmas drink serves as an oven-to-table baking dish for the pastry shell, which is then filled with chilled eggnog-flavored custard. The rum is reserved for the whipped-cream garnish (although you could also add a splash to the custard mixture before it sets).

« EGGNOG CUPS

SERVES 8

If you're not sure if your ceramic cups are ovenproof, use ordinary six-ounce custard cups or ramekins.

- 7 large egg yolks
- ⅔ cup granulated sugar
- 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour, sifted, plus more for dusting
- 2 cups milk
- ½ vanilla bean, split lengthwise and seeds scraped to loosen
- 1 teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
- 1 recipe Pâte Brisée (page 17)
- 1 cup plus 1 tablespoon heavy cream
- 2 tablespoons confectioners' sugar, sifted
- 1 tablespoon rum

1. With an electric mixer on high speed, whisk 6 egg yolks and the granulated sugar until thick and pale, and a ribbon forms on the surface when beaters are lifted. Add flour; mix until fully incorporated.

2. In a medium saucepan, bring milk, vanilla-bean seeds, and nutmeg to a boil over medium-high heat. With mixer running, pour about one-quarter hot-milk mixture into egg mixture, then slowly add egg mixture to saucepan with remaining milk. Cook over medium heat, whisking constantly, until mixture thickens and bubbles in center, 4 to 5 minutes. Pass through a fine sieve into a bowl; discard solids. Cover with plastic wrap, pressing it directly onto surface of custard to prevent a skin from forming. Let cool, 30 to 45 minutes. Chill until set, at least 2 hours, or up to overnight.

3. On a lightly floured surface, roll out pâte brisée to about ⅛ inch thick. Cut out eight 6-inch squares. Place squares in ovenproof ceramic cups, allowing excess to drape 1 to 2 inches over edges.

4. Whisk together remaining egg yolk and 1 tablespoon cream for egg wash; brush over surface of dough. Chill at least 1 hour, or up to overnight.

5. Preheat oven to 350°. Place cups on a baking sheet; gently prick bottoms of dough a few times with a fork. Bake until edges are a deep golden, 20 to 25 minutes. Transfer to a wire rack to cool completely.

6. With an electric mixer on medium-high speed, whip remaining cup cream. When cream starts to thicken, add confectioners' sugar, and mix until soft peaks form. Add rum; whip until soft peaks return.

7. To serve, spoon ¼ cup chilled custard into each cooled pastry shell. Garnish with a dollop of whipped cream.

MARIA ROBLEDO

APPLE PIE UPSIDE-DOWN CAKE

SEE RECIPE, PAGE 40

To give a popular upside-down cake seasonal flavors, thin slices of cored apple (instead of pineapple rings) are baked on the bottom of a thin cake layer. Cinnamon sticks are a fragrant addition. Once inverted, the cake, with its syrupy topping, has a rustic, homespun appeal.

"PUMPKIN PIE" CHEESECAKE

SEE RECIPE, PAGE 40

Here the nicely spiced filling for pumpkin pie (made with slightly sweeter butternut squash) is swirled through a rich and tangy sour cream–cheesecake batter.

update a classic

GINGERBREAD ICEBOX CAKE

SERVES 8 TO 10

You will need a 2⅜-inch fluted round pastry cutter (see the Guide) or a standard round cutter. You can make the cake in advance and refrigerate it overnight; the portion of each cookie covered with cream will soften, making the cake easy to slice.

All-purpose flour, for dusting
½ recipe Molasses-Gingerbread Cookie Dough (page 24)
4 cups heavy cream
¼ cup confectioners' sugar, sifted
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
Syrupy Blood Oranges (recipe follows)

1. Preheat oven to 350°, with racks in upper and lower positions. On generously floured pieces of parchment paper, roll out dough to about 1/16 inch thick. Brush off excess flour. Slide dough and parchment onto baking sheets, and freeze 10 minutes.

2. Using a 2⅜-inch fluted cutter, cut out rounds, rerolling scraps to get a total of 72. Transfer to parchment-lined baking sheets, and freeze 10 minutes.

3. Bake cookies 5 minutes. Remove sheets from oven; tap pans firmly on counter to flatten cookies. Return to oven, rotating sheets from top to bottom and front to back; bake until cookies are set and edges have darkened slightly, about 5 minutes more. Transfer sheets to wire racks to cool completely.

4. With an electric mixer on medium speed, beat cream, confectioners' sugar, and vanilla just until stiff peaks form. Arrange 7 cookies in a circle on a cake stand or a serving plate, sides touching; place 1 cookie in center (see below). Spread ¾ cup whipped cream over cookies, leaving a ¾-inch cookie border. Repeat, making 8 more layers each of cookies and whipped cream. Chill at least 1 hour.

5. Just before serving, spoon some of the oranges and their syrup over top. Serve remaining oranges on the side.

ASSEMBLING THE ICEBOX CAKE

Begin by arranging seven cookies, side by side, in a circle. Place another cookie in the center, as shown. Use an offset spatula to gently spread whipped cream over cookies, leaving the outer edges uncovered. Repeat to make nine layers of each, ending with whipped cream.

Syrupy Blood Oranges

MAKES ENOUGH FOR 1 GINGERBREAD ICEBOX CAKE

Regular oranges can be used instead of blood oranges in this recipe.

4 blood oranges, very thinly sliced into rounds
2 cups sugar
2 cups water

1. Bring a large pot of water to a boil. Add orange slices, and cook until semitranslucent, about 5 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer to a baking sheet.

2. Cut a round of parchment paper to fit in a large, shallow saucepan. Bring sugar and the water to a boil, stirring until sugar has dissolved. Carefully add orange slices; place parchment directly on surface. Reduce heat, and simmer gently until oranges have softened and liquid is syrupy, about 30 minutes. Remove from heat; let oranges cool in syrup.

3. Halve or quarter some of the orange slices, if desired. Oranges can be refrigerated in syrup up to 1 week in an airtight container; bring to room temperature before serving.

PUMPKIN FLAN IN PASTRY SHELL

MAKES 8

If you don't use pans in the sizes called for in this recipe, be sure the pastry shells you make are slightly larger than the flans.

2¾ cups sugar
1 cup water
2¼ cups milk
1½ cups canned unsweetened pumpkin puree (12 ounces)
2 teaspoons finely grated peeled fresh ginger
½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
¼ teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
¾ teaspoon salt
5 large whole eggs plus 2 egg yolks
2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract
All-purpose flour, for dusting
1 recipe Pâte Brisée (page 17)
Unsweetened whipped cream or crème fraîche, for serving (optional)

1. Set a large bowl three-quarters full of cold water near stove. Heat 2 cups sugar and 1 cup water in a small saucepan over medium-high, stirring until sugar dissolves. Bring to a boil without stirring, occasionally washing down sides of pan with a wet pastry brush to prevent crystals from forming. Boil until syrup turns deep amber, swirling pan to color evenly. Immediately immerse bottom of pan in cold water; remove.

2. Quickly divide caramel among eight 4-inch pie plates or ovenproof dishes; swirl to coat bottoms. Let cool (this can be done several hours ahead; keep at room temperature).

3. Preheat oven to 325°, with rack in center. Bring milk just to a boil in a small saucepan over high heat. Remove from heat. In a large bowl, combine pumpkin puree and remaining ¾ cup sugar with the ginger, spices, salt, whole eggs, and yolks. Mix in vanilla and hot milk; pass through a fine sieve into a bowl, discarding solids. Pour mixture into caramel-lined pie plates, filling each two-thirds of the way. Place pie plates in a roasting pan.

4. Place roasting pan in oven; carefully pour boiling water into roasting pan to reach halfway up sides of pie plates. Loosely tent a piece of aluminum foil over top of roasting pan (do not crimp or seal edges). Bake until flans are nearly set (a sharp knife inserted in centers should come out clean), about 1 hour. Transfer roasting pan to a wire rack to cool completely. Remove pie plates from water bath, and dry their undersides; refrigerate overnight, covered with plastic wrap.

5. Preheat oven to 375°. Place eight 5-inch flan rings or tart pans on a parchment-lined baking sheet. On a lightly floured surface, roll out pâte brisée to about ⅛ inch thick. Cut out eight 7-inch rounds (use a plate or an inverted bowl as a guide). Fit dough into flan rings; let excess drape over top. Work dough from top down, not center out, using knuckles to fit into bottom corners of rings. With a rolling pin, roll over rings to trim dough flush with rims. Prick bottoms of dough several times with a fork; chill at least 30 minutes, or up to overnight.

6. Line shells with parchment paper, pressing into corners; fill each with pie weights or dried beans. Bake 20 minutes; remove parchment. Bake until shells are golden brown, 2 to 4 minutes more. Transfer to a wire rack to cool about 1 hour. Remove from flan rings.

7. To unmold each flan, carefully run a sharp knife around edge to loosen. Place a cooled pastry shell on a plate. Invert flan into shell, so it is in the center, with caramel sauce filling the edges. Serve with whipped cream or crème fraîche, as desired.

JOHNNY MILLER

GINGERBREAD LINZERTORTE

MAKES ONE 10-INCH TART

- 2¼ cups all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting
- 1½ teaspoons baking powder
- 1 teaspoon ground ginger
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon ground cloves
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon freshly ground pepper
- ½ cup packed dark-brown sugar
- ½ cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, softened
- ⅓ cup unsulfured molasses
- 2 large egg yolks plus 1 large egg white
- 1¼ cups Raspberry Jam (recipe follows) or best-quality store-bought jam

1. Preheat oven to 325°, with rack in lowest position. Into a mixing bowl, sift together flour, baking powder, spices, salt, and pepper. Add brown sugar; with an electric mixer on medium-low speed, beat until combined. Add butter; mix until incorporated. Add molasses and egg yolks; mix until dough just comes together.

2. Turn out dough onto a lightly floured surface. Roll out two-thirds into a 12-inch round, about ¼ inch thick. Fit into a 10-inch tart pan with a removable bottom. Spread jam over bottom of shell; chill until cold, about 30 minutes.

3. Roll out remaining dough between pieces of floured parchment paper to a 10-inch round, ¼ inch thick. Transfer round with parchment to a baking sheet; chill until firm, about 30 minutes. Cut out shapes from round with mini dot and snowflake-shape cookie cutters. (If desired, reserve snowflake cutouts; bake 10 minutes at 350°, then sprinkle with confectioners' sugar.) Transfer round to a baking sheet; chill until firm, about 30 minutes.

4. Lightly beat egg white; brush over edge of tart shell. Carefully slide dough round over shell; press edges to adhere. Chill until firm, about 1 hour.

5. Bake until crust is golden brown and filling is bubbling, 50 to 60 minutes. Transfer to a wire rack to cool completely.

Raspberry Jam

MAKES ABOUT 2 CUPS

- 4 cups raspberries (three 6-ounce containers)
- 2 cups sugar

1. Stir together 3 cups raspberries and the sugar in a medium saucepan (off heat). Let stand 15 to 20 minutes, stirring occasionally, until berries begin to give off their juices.

2. Bring mixture to a boil over medium-high heat, stirring occasionally. Skim off foam. Reduce heat; simmer, skimming off foam, until slightly thickened, about 5 minutes.

3. Stir in remaining 1 cup raspberries; simmer just until berries break down, 1 to 2 minutes. Let cool completely. Refrigerate, covered, at least 4 hours, or up to overnight.

INSIDE-OUT BLACK FOREST CAKE

SERVES 8 TO 10

Use any type of preserved sour cherries. Morello is one variety that is generally available year-round in gourmet stores.

- 1 cup (2 sticks) plus 2 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened, plus more for pans
- 2½ cups plus 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour, plus more for pans
- 1 cup plus 2 tablespoons unsweetened Dutch-process cocoa powder
- 2 teaspoons baking soda
- ⅛ teaspoon salt
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 1 cup packed dark-brown sugar
- 3 large eggs, room temperature
- ¾ cup sour cream
- 1½ cups buttermilk
- 1 jar (12 ounces) preserved sour cherries (40 to 50)
- ¼ cup kirsch (cherry-flavored liqueur)
- Pastry Cream (recipe follows)
- Shiny Chocolate Ganache (recipe follows)

1. Preheat oven to 350°. Butter three 8-inch round cake pans; line bottoms with parchment paper. Butter parchment, and dust with flour, tapping out excess. Into a large bowl, sift together flour, cocoa, baking soda, and salt.

2. With an electric mixer on medium speed, cream butter and granulated sugar until fluffy. Add brown sugar; beat until fluffy. Add eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition. Mix in sour cream. Reduce speed to low. Add flour mixture in three batches, alternating with the buttermilk and beginning and ending with the flour.

3. Divide batter evenly among prepared pans. Bake, rotating pans halfway through, until firm to the touch and a toothpick inserted in the centers comes out clean, 25 to 30 minutes. Transfer pans to wire racks to cool completely. Run a knife around sides to loosen, then remove cakes from pans.

4. Drain cherries, reserving ¼ cup plus 2 tablespoons juice. Combine juice and kirsch. With a serrated knife, trim tops of cakes to make level. Brush top of each with one-third kirsch mixture. Place a cake layer on a cake stand or serving plate. Spread 1½ cups pastry cream evenly over cake; arrange 15 drained cherries on top. Place a second cake layer, brushed side up, on top. Spread with remaining cream; top with 15 more cherries. Top with third cake layer, brushed side down. Cake may be covered loosely in plastic wrap and refrigerated up to 4 hours.

5. To serve, warm the ganache in a bowl set over (not in) a pan of simmering water, just until spreadable. Pour onto middle of top cake layer, and spread evenly with an offset spatula. Garnish with remaining cherries.

Pastry Cream

MAKES 3 CUPS

- 2 large whole eggs plus 2 egg yolks
- ¾ cup sugar
- 6 tablespoons cornstarch
- 2 cups milk
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into small pieces
- 1½ teaspoons pure vanilla extract

1. With an electric mixer on medium-high speed, whisk whole eggs, yolks, and ½ cup sugar until pale and thick. Sift in cornstarch; whisk on medium-low speed until combined.

2. Meanwhile, prepare an ice-water bath. Bring milk and remaining ¼ cup sugar to a boil in a medium saucepan. Whisking constantly, slowly pour half the milk mixture into the egg mixture; whisk until smooth. Pour mixture back into saucepan with remaining milk; whisk over medium heat until mixture reaches the consistency of mayonnaise, 2 to 3 minutes more.

3. Pass through a fine sieve into a large bowl; discard solids. Add butter, a few pieces at a time, stirring until melted after each addition. Set bowl in ice-water bath until chilled. Stir in vanilla. Cover with plastic wrap, pressing it directly on surface of pastry cream; chill until set, at least 2 hours, or up to overnight.

Shiny Chocolate Ganache

MAKES 1 CUP

- 5 ounces semisweet chocolate
- ⅓ cup heavy cream
- 1 tablespoon honey

Finely chop chocolate in a food processor. In a small saucepan, stir together cream and honey; bring just to a boil. With machine running, slowly pour hot-cream mixture through the feed tube; process until combined. Transfer to a bowl, and cover with plastic wrap; refrigerate at least 3 hours, or up to 2 days.

TRIPLE-CHOCOLATE MOUSSE CAKES

MAKES 8

- ⅔ cup all-purpose flour
- ⅓ cup unsweetened Dutch-process cocoa powder
- ⅔ cup sugar
- ¾ teaspoon baking soda
- ½ teaspoon baking powder
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 1 large egg, room temperature
- ¼ cup milk
- 3 tablespoons safflower or other neutral-tasting vegetable oil
- ½ teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- ¼ cup water
- Chocolate Mousses (recipe follows)
- 2 ounces semisweet chocolate
- Vegetable-oil cooking spray

1. Preheat oven to 350°. Place eight 6-ounce (3½-inch diameter) ramekins on a rimmed

baking sheet, and coat with cooking spray. In a mixing bowl, whisk together flour, cocoa, sugar, baking soda, baking powder, and salt. Add egg, milk, oil, vanilla, and the water; with an electric mixer on medium-low speed, beat until smooth and combined.

2. Divide batter evenly among prepared ramekins. Bake until a cake tester inserted in the centers comes out clean, about 20 minutes. Transfer to a wire rack to cool completely. Run a knife around sides of cakes to loosen before unmolding. Cakes can be refrigerated, wrapped in plastic, up to 1 day.

3. Trim each cake to a 1-inch height with a serrated knife. Transfer to a parchment-lined baking sheet. Cut out eight 4-by-11-inch strips of parchment; wrap a strip around base of each cake (keep bottom flush with sheet) to make a collar. Secure collar with tape.

4. Transfer bittersweet-chocolate mousse to a pastry bag fitted with a large round tip (such as Ateco #808). Pipe a 1-inch layer of mousse into each parchment collar. Chill until set, about 20 minutes. Repeat with milk-chocolate mousse, piping on top of the bittersweet-chocolate mousse. Chill 4 hours, or up to overnight.

5. Microwave semisweet chocolate 15 to 30 seconds, until slightly warm but not melted. Scrape at a 45-degree angle with a vegetable peeler, forming curls. To serve, remove parchment collars; garnish with chocolate curls.

Chocolate Mousses

MAKES ENOUGH FOR 8 CAKES

This recipe makes two types of mousse. To melt the chocolates, finely chop them, then place in separate bowls; set each bowl over (not in) a pan of simmering water, and stir until smooth.

- 3⅓ cups heavy cream
- 8 large egg yolks, room temperature
- ½ cup sugar
- 4 tablespoons light corn syrup
- 4 tablespoons water
- 7 ounces bittersweet chocolate, melted
- 2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract
- Salt
- 7 ounces milk chocolate, melted

1. With an electric mixer on medium-high speed, whisk cream until soft peaks form. Divide between 2 bowls; chill 1 hour.

2. In a clean mixing bowl, and with a clean whisk, beat 4 yolks on high speed until pale and frothy. Meanwhile, bring ¼ cup sugar and 2 tablespoons each corn syrup and water to a boil in a small, heavy saucepan over high heat, stirring to dissolve sugar. Cook until bubbles form, about 1 minute. With mixer on medium-low speed, carefully pour hot syrup down side of bowl. Beat on medium-high speed until slightly thickened, about 5 minutes. Stir in bittersweet chocolate, 1 teaspoon vanilla, and a pinch of salt with a flexible spatula.

3. Add one-third of bittersweet-chocolate mixture to one portion of whipped cream; whisk to combine. Add remaining bittersweet-chocolate mixture, whisking until completely combined. Pass through a coarse sieve into a large bowl; discard any solids.

4. Repeat steps 2 and 3, using milk chocolate instead of bittersweet.

NOTE: *The egg yolks in this recipe are not fully cooked. It should not be prepared for pregnant women, babies, young children, the elderly, or anyone whose health is compromised.*

APPLE PIE UPSIDE-DOWN CAKE

SERVES 10 TO 12

- 1¼ cups (2½ sticks) unsalted butter, softened, plus more for pan
- 1½ cups packed light-brown sugar
- 3 tablespoons Calvados or other brandy
- Salt
- 3 cinnamon sticks
- 6 apples, preferably Braeburn or McIntosh (about 2½ pounds), peeled, cored, and cut into ¼-inch-thick rings
- 2¼ cups all-purpose flour
- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- ½ teaspoon baking powder
- ¾ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1½ cups granulated sugar
- 3 large eggs
- 1½ teaspoons pure vanilla extract
- ½ cup sour cream

1. Preheat oven to 375°. Butter a 12-by-1-inch round pizza pan (or use a 12-inch tart pan). Line bottom with parchment paper, and butter parchment. With an electric mixer on medium-high speed, beat ½ cup butter with the brown sugar, brandy, and a pinch of salt until pale and fluffy. Spread mixture evenly in prepared pan. Arrange cinnamon sticks on top. Layer with apple rings, pressing them gently into mixture.

2. Into a medium bowl, sift together flour, baking soda, baking powder, ¾ teaspoon salt, and ground cinnamon. In a clean mixing bowl, cream remaining ¾ cup butter and granulated sugar on medium-high speed until pale and fluffy. Mix in eggs, one at a time, and vanilla. Reduce speed to low. Add flour mixture in two batches, alternating with one addition of sour cream. Gently spread batter over apples.

3. Bake until cake is golden brown and a cake tester inserted in center comes out clean, about 45 minutes. Transfer to a wire rack; let cool 15 minutes before inverting onto a serving plate. Cake can be stored up to 1 day, covered, at room temperature.

"PUMPKIN PIE" CHEESECAKE

SERVES 12 TO 14

FOR THE CRUST:

- 6 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened
- ⅓ cup sugar
- 1 large egg yolk
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- 1 cup all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting
- Pinch of salt

FOR THE FILLING:

- 1 small butternut squash (1¾ pounds)
- Unsalted butter, for parchment and pan
- ¾ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon ground ginger
- ⅛ teaspoon ground allspice
- ⅛ teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
- 2½ pounds cream cheese, softened
- 1¾ cups sugar
- ½ cup all-purpose flour
- ¾ cup sour cream
- 1¼ teaspoons pure vanilla extract
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 5 large eggs

1. Make the crust: With an electric mixer on medium speed, cream butter and sugar until pale and fluffy. Mix in egg yolk and vanilla. Reduce speed to low. Add flour and salt; mix until dough just comes together. Turn out dough onto a piece of plastic wrap; shape into a disk. Chill, wrapped tightly, at least 30 minutes, or up to overnight.

2. Meanwhile, make the filling: Preheat oven to 350°. Cut squash in half lengthwise; remove seeds. Place squash, cut sides down, on a baking sheet lined with buttered parchment paper. Bake until tender, about 45 minutes. Transfer sheet to a wire rack to cool.

3. On a lightly floured surface, roll out dough to a 10-inch round, a scant ¼ inch thick. Fit into bottom of a 10-inch springform pan. Freeze 15 minutes. Transfer to oven; bake until crust is firm and pale golden, 12 to 15 minutes. Transfer pan to a wire rack to cool completely. Reduce oven to 325°.

4. Scoop squash flesh into a food processor; process until pureed. Transfer 1 cup puree to a medium bowl; reserve remainder for another use. Stir in spices.

5. Wrap sides and bottom of springform pan in a double layer of aluminum foil. Butter insides of pan. With an electric mixer on medium speed, beat cream cheese until fluffy. Gradually add sugar and flour, mixing until smooth. Mix in sour cream, vanilla, and salt. Mix in eggs, one at a time, until just combined; do not overmix.

6. Stir 2 cups cream-cheese mixture into squash mixture. Pour remaining cream-cheese mixture in prepared pan. Dollop with squash mixture; gently swirl with a butter knife.

7. Set springform in a roasting pan. Transfer to oven. Carefully pour boiling water into roasting pan to come halfway up sides of springform. Bake until cake is set but still slightly wobbly in center, 50 to 60 minutes. Turn off oven; let stand in oven with door slightly ajar 1 hour. Transfer springform to a wire rack to cool completely. Chill at least 6 hours, or up to overnight. Run a knife around sides to loosen before unmolding cake.

box up the cookies

COOKIES ARE A SWEET BOON TO THE busy baker. Not only are they well-loved holiday symbols (imagine Christmas without sugar-cookie cutouts), making a bunch can be an affordable—and entirely enjoyable—way to take care of a lot of gifts at once. Many doughs can be conveniently frozen ahead. Of course, everyone has a favorite flavor and texture, so hedge your bets by preparing an assortment. Spritz, thumbprints, lacies, and spirals (among others) will please fans of the classics, while kids of all ages will appreciate old-fashioned candy-cane cookies. Chocolate lovers, too, have plenty to celebrate, including black-and-white cheesecake bars with a modern spin. Whether displayed on a tray or tucked into boxes as thoughtful presents, cookies are the most delicious way to share glad tidings. Just be sure to save a few for Santa.

SUGAR-COOKIE BELL CUTOUTS

SEE RECIPE, PAGE 50

Christmas bells sparkle, thanks to glittering sanding sugar sprinkled on top; decorating them in a spectrum of one shade results in a stylish presentation. Assorted cupcake liners in coordinating colors accommodate cookies in three sizes.

CANDY-CANE COOKIES AND CHOCOLATE SANDWICH COOKIES

SEE RECIPES, PAGE 50

Twisted red-and-white cookie canes evoke their candy counterparts; these large-scale versions are fanciful and fun. Chocolate sandwich cookies, with a variety of flavorful fillings, create boldly striped packages when lined up neatly and wrapped in cellophane.

LAURIE FRANKEL

BLACK-AND-WHITE CHEESECAKE BARS

SEE RECIPE, PAGE 51

Because they are baked in one big block, bar cookies are especially easy to make. Here, soft cheesecake batter tops a dense chocolate-cookie crust. The piped-lattice pattern is made from the same chocolate dough as the base; you can simply crumble the dough on top for a less formal finish.

SPRITZ SUGAR COOKIES

SEE RECIPE, PAGE 51

A cookie press, or spritz, makes quick work of shaping dough into dozens of uniformly appealing cookies. Dip the tops in a simple glaze, then finish with colored sprinkles or piped dots. Enclose the cookies in small square clear boxes, then string tiny beads on a thin wire and tie into a playful bow.

Completely evocative of the season, cookies can be offered as gifts, nibbles, or dessert. I've even had cookie parties at holiday time. —MARTHA

LAURIE FRANKEL

SINGLE-SERVING SWEETS

SEE RECIPES, PAGES 51 AND 52

Three delicious cookies—lemon-oatmeal lacies, chocolate-almond spirals, and cowboy cookies (chock-full of nuts, coconut, and chocolate chunks)—meet one clever wrapping idea: Line easy-to-make paper envelopes with waxed tissue, and seal with punched-paper labels.

Clockwise from top right: rugelach (wrapped in waxed and tissue papers), hazelnut–dried fruit biscotti, chocolate-dipped coconut macaroon trees, Greek almond-anise cookies, and orange thumbprints.

COOKIE BOX

SEE RECIPES, PAGES 52 AND 53

Keep things merry and bright with a box full of cookies in subtle shades of white. Include cookies with contrasting flavors, textures, and shapes for an appetizing assortment. White parchment, paper candy cups, and the pale wooden box continue the theme.

LAURIE FRANKEL

CHOCOLATE MINT WAFERS

SEE RECIPE, PAGE 53

A homemade version of the Girl Scout classic, minty chocolate-coated rounds are dressed up for the holidays with rings of white nonpareils. (Some are left plain for a more interesting display.) The cookies' shape and size make them easy to gift wrap (see page 44 for one idea).

box up the cookies

SUGAR-COOKIE BELL CUTOUTS

MAKES 2 TO 3 DOZEN

The secret to crisp-looking outlines is to chill the dough before and after cutting out the shapes. The cookies shown were made with bell-shaped cookie cutters in three different sizes (1½-, 2½-, and 3½-inch; see the Guide), but you could use just one size. This dough also works well with other favorite holiday shapes. You can also sprinkle the cookies with sanding sugar in different colors than the ones listed below.

- 1 cup (2 sticks) unsalted butter, softened
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 large egg
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- 3 cups all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting
- White, pink, and red sanding sugar, for decorating

1. With an electric mixer on medium-high speed, cream butter, granulated sugar, and salt until light and fluffy. Add egg, and beat well to combine. Beat in vanilla. With mixer on low speed, add flour and mix just until incorporated (do not overmix). Divide dough in half; form into disks, and wrap in plastic. Chill until firm, at least 2 hours, or up to 2 days. (Dough can be frozen up to 2 months; thaw in the refrigerator before using.)

2. Remove one disk of dough from refrigerator; let stand until soft enough to roll, 5 to 10 minutes. Roll out between lightly floured pieces of parchment paper to a uniform ⅛- to ¼-inch thickness. Place on a baking sheet (still sandwiched in paper) and chill in freezer until firm, 15 to 20 minutes.

3. Line baking sheets with parchment paper. Remove one sheet of dough from freezer. Peel paper from top; loosen dough from bottom paper (to ensure easy removal after cutting). Using bell-shaped cookie cutters, cut out shapes, dipping cutter into flour each time and transferring shapes to prepared sheets (2 inches apart) as you work. (If dough becomes too soft to work with, chill again and continue cutting.) Gather together scraps; roll, chill, and cut out more shapes. Chill in freezer until firm, 15 to 30 minutes. Repeat with the other disk of dough.

4. Preheat oven to 350°. Bake, rotating sheets halfway through, until cookies are barely golden around the edges, about 14 minutes. Transfer sheets to a wire rack to cool completely.

5. To decorate, brush tops of cookies lightly with water. Sprinkle with sanding sugar, as desired; tap off excess. Cookies can be stored up to 1 week in airtight containers.

CANDY-CANE COOKIES

MAKES SIX 8-INCH CANDY CANES

- 1 cup (2 sticks) unsalted butter, softened
- 1 cup sifted confectioners' sugar
- 1 large egg
- ½ teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- ½ teaspoon pure almond or peppermint extract
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 2½ cups all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting
- Red food coloring, preferably gel-paste
- Coarse sanding sugar, for decorating

1. With an electric mixer on medium speed, cream butter and confectioners' sugar until light and fluffy. Beat in the egg, both extracts, and salt. With mixer on low speed, add flour, beating until combined. Divide dough in half. Knead food coloring into one half until desired color is reached. Form dough into disks, and wrap in plastic. Chill 20 minutes, or up to overnight. (Dough can be frozen up to 1 month; thaw in the refrigerator before using.)

2. Line baking sheets with parchment paper. Divide untinted dough into 6 pieces. On a lightly floured surface, shape each into a 12-inch-long log. Chill 10 minutes, until firm but pliable. Repeat with tinted dough. Twist a tinted and an untinted piece together; bend one end to form a cane. Repeat. Arrange 2 inches apart on prepared sheets. Chill 1 hour (or up to overnight, covered in plastic).

3. Preheat oven to 325°. Bake, rotating sheets halfway through, until cookies are firm but not taking on any color, 20 to 24 minutes. Transfer sheets to wire racks to cool completely.

4. Brush untinted stripes of candy canes with water. Sprinkle with sanding sugar; tap off excess. Cookies can be stored up to 1 week at room temperature in an airtight container.

CHOCOLATE SANDWICH COOKIES

MAKES 15 SANDWICHES

This all-purpose chocolate dough is a good option for making any rolled and cutout cookie, including the gingerbread shapes that top the cupcakes on page 95. It can be rolled out multiple times, and produces dark and delicious cookies that keep well. Chill the sandwich cookies thoroughly, preferably overnight, before wrapping them; this will ensure that their soft centers become nice and firm.

- ¾ cup all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting
- ⅓ cup unsweetened Dutch-process cocoa powder
- ⅛ teaspoon salt
- 6 tablespoons (¾ stick) unsalted butter, softened
- ¾ cup confectioners' sugar, sifted
- 1 large egg
- ½ teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- Filling (recipe follows)
- Vegetable-oil cooking spray

1. Line baking sheets with parchment paper; lightly coat with cooking spray. Whisk together flour, cocoa, and salt. With an electric mixer on medium-high speed, cream butter and confectioners' sugar until pale and fluffy. Beat in egg and vanilla. With mixer on low speed, gradually add flour mixture, beating to combine. Divide dough in half; form into disks, and wrap in plastic. Chill until firm, at least 2 hours, or up to 2 days. (Dough can be frozen up to 2 months; thaw in the refrigerator before using.)

2. Working with one disk at a time, roll out dough to a ⅛-inch thickness on a lightly floured surface. Using a 1½-inch square biscuit or cookie cutter, cut out shapes, transferring to prepared sheets (1 inch apart) as you work. Chill in freezer until firm, about 15 minutes. Brush off excess flour. Gather together scraps; roll, chill, and cut out more shapes.

3. Preheat oven to 325°. Bake cookies, rotating sheets halfway through, until edges are firm, 12 to 14 minutes. Transfer cookies, on parchment, to a wire rack to cool completely.

4. Spread a small amount of filling on half the cookies. Top with remaining cookies; gently press to adhere. Assembled cookies can be refrigerated up to 2 days in an airtight container.

Filling

MAKES 1 CUP (ENOUGH FOR 15 SANDWICH COOKIES)

To make more than one flavor of filling, divide the butter mixture among small bowls (one for each flavor) and reduce the flavoring ingredients accordingly.

- 6 tablespoons (¾ stick) unsalted butter, softened
- 2 cups confectioners' sugar, sifted
- Flavoring (see below)

With an electric mixer on medium-high speed, beat butter until smooth. Add confectioners' sugar, and beat until light and fluffy. Stir in one of the flavorings. Use immediately.

CHOCOLATE: Finely chop 5 ounces semisweet chocolate; melt in a heatproof bowl set over (not in) a pan of barely simmering water, stirring until smooth. Let cool. Stir into filling, along with 2 tablespoons milk.

MINT: Stir 1 to 2 drops pure mint extract and 1 drop mint-green food coloring into filling.

RASPBERRY: Heat ½ cup raspberry jam, then strain into filling. Stir to combine.

COFFEE: Stir in ½ teaspoon coffee extract (see the Guide) into filling.

PEANUT BUTTER: Beat ½ cup smooth peanut butter and 2 tablespoons milk into filling.

BLACK-AND-WHITE CHEESECAKE BARS

MAKES 20

- 2 cups plus 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- ¾ cup unsweetened Dutch-process cocoa powder
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1¼ cups (2½ sticks) unsalted butter, softened
- 2 cups granulated sugar
- 3 large eggs
- 2½ teaspoons pure vanilla extract
- 8 ounces cream cheese, softened
- ½ cup confectioners' sugar, sifted
- Vegetable-oil cooking spray

1. Coat a 9-by-13-inch baking dish with cooking spray. Line dish with parchment, leaving a 2-inch overhang on long sides, then spray parchment.

2. Into a large bowl, sift together flour, cocoa, baking soda, and salt. With an electric mixer on medium-high speed, cream butter and granulated sugar until smooth. Add 2 eggs and 2 teaspoons vanilla, and beat until smooth, scraping down sides of bowl as needed. With mixer on low speed, gradually add flour mixture. Increase speed to medium; beat until incorporated.

3. Preheat oven to 325°. Reserve 1 cup of dough; cover, and refrigerate. Press remaining dough into bottom of prepared dish. Chill 30 minutes. Bake until base is set and edges are puffed, about 25 minutes. Transfer dish to a wire rack to cool completely.

4. Mix cream cheese, confectioners' sugar, and remaining egg and ½ teaspoon vanilla in a medium bowl. Spread over cooled base. Using a pastry bag fitted with a large plain tip (such as Ateco #802), pipe reserved dough on top. (Let soften slightly if it is too hard to pipe.) Starting at one corner and working in even intervals across, pipe diagonal lines in one direction. Then pipe diagonal lines perpendicular to the first set.

5. Bake until filling is set, 25 to 30 minutes. Let cool in dish on wire rack, then use overhang to lift out. Trim edges. Cut into 20 bars (1½ by 2½ inches). Bars can be refrigerated up to 3 days in airtight containers.

SPRITZ SUGAR COOKIES

MAKES 4 DOZEN

Using a cookie press is just like squeezing Play-Doh through an extruder. Fill the cylinder with dough, and pop out dozens of shapes in a matter of minutes. The spritz has a variety of disks to choose from; a five-petal flower disk was used here, but wreaths or other shapes are equally charming. Once the cookies are baked and cooled, they can be coated with a simple sugar glaze before decorating with colorful embellishments.

- 1 disk Sugar Cookie Dough (page 50)
- Confectioners' Sugar Glaze (recipe follows)
- Red nonpareils, for decorating
- Pink and green food coloring, preferably gel-paste, for decorating

1. Line baking sheets with parchment paper. Fit cookie press with five-petal flower disk and fill with dough. Press out shapes onto prepared sheets (about 2 inches apart). Chill until firm, at least 1 hour, or up to overnight.

2. Preheat oven to 350°. Bake, rotating sheets halfway through, until barely golden around the edges, 10 to 14 minutes. Transfer sheets to wire racks to cool completely.

3. Divide glaze among three bowls. Leave one untinted. With food coloring, tint each of the others pale pink or pale green. Place green glaze in a small pastry bag fitted with a small plain tip (such as #3) or a parchment cornet. Dip two-thirds of the cookies in white glaze; sprinkle half with red nonpareils; let the other half set, then pipe a green dot on each of the petals. Transfer remaining untinted glaze to another pastry bag fitted with a #3 tip. Dip remaining cookies in pink glaze; pipe a white dot in each center. Let set, at least 2 hours. Cookies can be stored, between layers of parchment, up to 1 week at room temperature in airtight containers.

Confectioners' Sugar Glaze

- 1 cup confectioners' sugar, sifted
- 2 tablespoons water

Mix confectioners' sugar and the water to achieve an easy-to-pour consistency, adding more water as necessary. Use immediately.

LEMON-OATMEAL LACIES

MAKES 5 DOZEN

- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 large eggs
- ½ teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- Freshly grated zest of 1 lemon
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 cup old-fashioned rolled oats (not instant or quick-cooking)
- Vegetable-oil cooking spray

1. Preheat oven to 350°. Coat baking sheets with cooking spray; line with parchment, and spray parchment.

2. With an electric mixer on medium speed, beat butter and sugar until crumbly. Add eggs, vanilla, zest, and salt. Beat until pale and smooth, about 1 minute. Mix in baking powder and oats. Let stand 10 minutes.

3. Drop batter by the teaspoon, 3 inches apart, onto prepared sheets. Press each into a round with the back of a spoon. Bake until golden, about 9 minutes. Transfer cookies (still on parchment) to wire racks to cool completely. Carefully remove from parchment with a spatula. Cookies can be stored up to 2 days at room temperature in airtight containers.

CHOCOLATE-ALMOND SPIRALS

MAKES 30

- 1¼ cups (2½ sticks) unsalted butter, softened
- 1½ cups sugar
- 2 large whole eggs plus 1 egg white
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 tablespoon pure vanilla extract
- ½ cup milk
- 4 cups all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting
- 1 cup unsweetened cocoa powder
- Almond Dough (recipe follows)

1. With an electric mixer on medium-high speed, cream butter and sugar until pale and fluffy. Beat in whole eggs and salt. Add vanilla, milk, flour, and cocoa; mix until incorporated.

2. Turn out dough onto a piece of plastic wrap, and shape into a rectangle; wrap. Chill until firm, at least 1 hour, or up to 1 day.

3. On a generously floured 12-by-26-inch sheet of parchment paper, roll out chocolate dough to an 11-by-24-inch rectangle, dusting with flour as needed and occasionally lifting dough with an offset spatula to prevent sticking. Chill again.

4. On another generously floured piece of parchment, roll out almond dough to a 9½-by-24-inch rectangle, as described above.

5. Lightly beat egg white; brush over chocolate dough. Gently stack almond dough on top, aligning flush on one long side (there will be a 1½-inch space on the other long side). Cut stack crosswise into thirds to make three 8-by-11-inch rectangles. Starting with the short side where the edges are flush, roll doughs together into a log, gently lifting parchment as you go. Lightly brush edge with egg white; seal seam by pinching and pressing gently. Wrap log in parchment or waxed paper. Repeat with remaining two stacked rectangles. Chill in freezer until firm, about 1½ hours, or up to 1 month.

6. Preheat oven to 350°. Line baking sheets with parchment paper. Let dough stand at room temperature 10 minutes. Using a serrated knife, cut log into ¼-inch-thick rounds,

rotating log after each cut to keep it round. Transfer rounds to sheets. Bake until set but not taking on any color, 18 to 20 minutes. Transfer cookies (still on parchment) to wire racks to cool completely. Cookies can be stored up to 5 days at room temperature in airtight containers.

Almond Dough

MAKES ENOUGH FOR 30 SPIRALS

- 1 cup blanched whole almonds (4 ounces)
- ½ cup sugar
- ⅔ cup almond paste (7 ounces)
- 1½ cups all-purpose flour
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, cut into small pieces
- 2 large eggs
- ½ teaspoon pure vanilla extract

1. Preheat oven to 350°. Spread almonds in a single layer on a rimmed baking sheet. Toast in oven, tossing occasionally, until darkened and fragrant, 10 to 13 minutes. Let cool.

2. Pulse together sugar, almond paste, flour, and salt in a food processor until very fine. Add toasted nuts; process until finely ground. Add butter, eggs, and vanilla; pulse until combined. Turn out dough onto a piece of plastic wrap, and shape into a rectangle; wrap. Chill until firm, at least 1 hour, or up to 1 day.

COWBOY COOKIES

MAKES ABOUT 5 DOZEN

The origin of the name is unclear, but the cookies do seem hearty enough for the Wild West. They have a soft, chewy texture all their own.

- ¾ cup pecans (3 ounces)
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon baking powder
- 1 cup (2 sticks) unsalted butter, softened
- ¾ cup granulated sugar
- ¾ cup packed light-brown sugar
- 2 large eggs
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- 1½ cups old-fashioned oats (not instant or quick-cooking)
- 6 ounces semisweet chocolate, cut into ¼-inch chunks
- ½ cup shredded unsweetened coconut
- Vegetable-oil cooking spray

1. Preheat oven to 350°. Spread pecans in a single layer on a rimmed baking sheet. Toast in oven, tossing occasionally, until darkened and fragrant, 10 to 13 minutes. Let cool, then coarsely chop. Into a bowl, sift together flour, baking soda, salt, and baking powder.

2. With an electric mixer on medium-high speed, cream butter and both sugars until pale and fluffy. Reduce speed to medium. Add eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition. Beat in vanilla.

3. With mixer on low speed, gradually add flour mixture, beating until just incorporated. Beat in oats, chocolate, pecans, and coconut until just combined. (Dough can be covered with plastic and refrigerated up to 3 days.)

4. Coat baking sheets with cooking spray; line with parchment, and spray parchment. Using a 1½-inch ice-cream scoop or a tablespoon, drop dough onto prepared sheets, about 3 inches apart.

5. Bake, rotating sheets halfway through, until edges of cookies begin to brown, 16 to 18 minutes. Transfer sheets to wire racks to cool 5 minutes. Transfer cookies to racks to cool completely. Cookies can be stored up to 3 days at room temperature in airtight containers.

HAZELNUT-DRIED FRUIT BISCOTTI

MAKES ABOUT 3 DOZEN

The uncut baked log can be stored up to one week at room temperature in an airtight container. Slice just before baking again.

- 1 cup unblanched hazelnuts (4 ounces)
- ½ cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, softened
- 1½ cups sugar
- 2 teaspoons finely grated lemon zest
- 2 large eggs
- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- ½ teaspoon baking powder
- ½ teaspoon course salt
- 3 cups all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting
- ½ cup chopped dried apricots
- ½ cup dried cranberries
- 12 ounces white chocolate, finely chopped

1. Preheat oven to 250°. Spread hazelnuts in a single layer on a rimmed baking sheet. Toast in oven, stirring halfway through, until fragrant and skins begin to crack, about 20 minutes. Remove from oven. While nuts are still hot, place in a kitchen towel; rub to remove skins (some may remain). Let cool.

2. Raise oven to 325°. Line baking sheets with parchment paper. With an electric mixer on medium-high speed, cream butter, sugar, and zest until pale and fluffy. Add eggs, one at a time, beating until incorporated after each. Stir in baking soda, baking powder, and salt with a wooden spoon, then stir in flour, nuts, and dried fruits until well combined. Turn out onto a lightly floured surface; roll into a 3¼-by-15-inch-log.

3. Transfer to a prepared sheet, and bake, rotating sheet halfway through, until golden brown and firm, about 1 hour. Transfer sheet to a wire rack to cool about 15 minutes. Transfer log to a cutting board; using a serrated knife, cut into a little larger than ¼-inch-wide slices. Arrange, cut sides down, on prepared sheets; bake, rotating sheets halfway through, until golden and firm, about 23 minutes. Transfer sheets to wire racks to cool completely.

4. Replace parchment on baking sheets. Melt white chocolate in a heatproof bowl set over (not in) a pan of barely simmering water, stirring until smooth. Remove from heat. Dip each biscotti in chocolate to coat half, then place on prepared sheets. Chill until chocolate is set, about 30 minutes. Biscotti can be stored, between layers of parchment, up to 3 days at a cool room temperature in airtight containers.

RUGELACH

MAKES ABOUT 4 DOZEN

- 2 cups all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting
- ¼ teaspoon coarse salt
- 1 cup (2 sticks) unsalted butter, softened
- 8 ounces cream cheese, softened
- ½ cup sugar
- 1½ teaspoons ground cinnamon
- ¼ teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
- ¾ cup apricot preserves
- 1 cup finely chopped toasted walnuts (5 ounces)
- 1 cup currants
- ½ cup golden raisins, coarsely chopped
- 3 tablespoons heavy cream

1. Whisk together flour and salt. With an electric mixer on medium speed, beat butter and cream cheese until combined. Reduce speed to low. Add flour mixture; beat to combine. Turn out dough onto a lightly floured surface. Roll into a ball; wrap in plastic. Chill until firm, about 6 hours, or up to overnight.

2. Preheat oven to 325°. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Whisk together sugar, cinnamon, and nutmeg. Divide dough into quarters. Working with one piece at a time, roll out dough on a lightly floured surface to an 8-by-12-inch rectangle. With a long side facing you, spread with 3 tablespoons preserves, leaving a ¼-inch border. Sprinkle with ¼ cup each walnuts and currants, 2 tablespoons raisins, and about 2 tablespoons sugar mixture. Starting with a long side, tightly roll dough into a log; place, seam side down, on prepared sheet. Repeat with remaining dough.

3. Brush each log with cream; sprinkle with 1 teaspoon sugar mixture. Bake until golden brown, about 45 minutes. Transfer to a wire rack to cool 15 minutes. Slice into 1-inch-thick pieces. Rugelach can be stored up to 2 days at room temperature in airtight containers.

ORANGE THUMBPRINTS

MAKES ABOUT 60

FOR THE DOUGH

- 1 cup (2 sticks) unsalted butter, softened
- ½ cup granulated sugar
- 2 large egg yolks, room temperature
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- 2½ cups all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon coarse salt

FOR THE FILLING

- ⅓ cup granulated sugar
- 1 tablespoon all-purpose flour
- 1 large egg, room temperature
- 1 teaspoon finely grated orange zest, plus 1 tablespoon fresh orange juice
- ⅛ teaspoon coarse salt
- Confectioners' sugar, for dusting

1. Make dough: With an electric mixer on medium-high speed, cream butter and granulated sugar until pale and fluffy. Add yolks and vanilla, and beat 1 minute. Reduce speed to low; beat in flour and salt until combined. Cover bowl with plastic wrap, and chill until firm, at least 1 hour, or up to 1 day.

2. Make filling: Preheat oven to 325°. Line baking sheets with parchment or waxed paper; lightly coat with cooking spray. Whisk together granulated sugar, flour, and egg. Stir in zest, juice, and salt.

3. Form balls of dough (each equal to 2 teaspoons), and place on prepared sheets, about 1 inch apart. With the handle of a wooden spoon, press gently in the center of each to create an indentation. Bake 10 minutes. Remove from oven. Press centers again if indentations lose definition. Spoon filling into centers. Continue baking until cookies are light brown around edges, 10 to 12 minutes more. Transfer sheets to wire racks to cool completely before dusting with confectioners' sugar. Cookies can be stored up to 2 days at room temperature in airtight containers.

GREEK ALMOND-ANISE COOKIES

MAKES ABOUT 3 DOZEN

Coated in confectioners' sugar and with a shortbreadlike texture, these cookies are a longstanding Greek holiday tradition.

- 3½ cups all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- ¾ teaspoon salt
- 1 pound (4 sticks) unsalted butter, softened
- 2⅔ cups confectioners sugar
- 2 large egg yolks
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- 1 cup finely chopped almonds (5 ounces)
- 1½ teaspoons anise seed

1. Into a medium bowl, sift together flour, baking powder, and salt. With an electric mixer on medium-high speed, beat butter until light and fluffy. Add ⅔ cup confectioners' sugar, yolks, and vanilla, and beat until combined. With mixer on low speed, beat in flour mixture until combined, then mix in almonds and anise seed.

2. Line baking sheets with parchment paper. Divide dough in half. On a lightly floured surface, roll one portion into a 1½-inch-thick log. With the palm of your hand, slightly flatten the top of the log. Place on a prepared sheet, and chill until firm, about 1 hour.

3. Preheat oven to 350°. Using a sharp knife, cut off the end of the log at an angle, then continue to cut into 1½-inch-thick diamonds. Place on prepared sheets, and bake, rotating sheets halfway through, until lightly golden on bottom, about 12 minutes.

4. Transfer sheets to a wire rack to cool completely. Place remaining 2 cups confectioners' sugar in a bowl. Working in batches, drop in a few cookies at a time, turning to coat thoroughly with sugar. Cookies can be stored, between layers of parchment, up to 5 days at room temperature in airtight containers.

CHOCOLATE-DIPPED COCONUT MACAROON TREES

MAKES ABOUT 2 DOZEN

- 8 large egg whites
- 2 cups sugar
- 1¼ teaspoons coarse salt
- 1½ teaspoons pure vanilla extract
- 7 cups finely shredded unsweetened coconut
- 8 ounces bittersweet chocolate, finely chopped
- Vegetable-oil cooking spray

1. Combine egg whites, sugar, and salt in a heatproof bowl set over (not in) a pan of simmering water, stirring until the sugar is dissolved and mixture is warm to the touch. Remove from heat; add vanilla and coconut, stirring to combine. Let mixture cool completely, about 30 minutes (or up to overnight in the refrigerator, covered with plastic wrap).

2. Preheat oven to 350°. Line rimmed baking sheets with waxed paper. Coat 3½-inch-tall tree-shape cookie cutters with cooking spray. Press coconut mixture into cutters, packing firmly. Unmold carefully, keeping shape intact, onto prepared sheets. Bake, rotating sheets halfway through, until golden brown in spots, 16 to 19 minutes. Transfer to a wire rack to cool completely.

3. Replace parchment on baking sheets. Melt chocolate in a heatproof bowl set over (not in) a pan of simmering water, stirring until smooth. Dip bottoms of macaroons in chocolate, then place on prepared sheets. Chill until set, about 20 minutes. Cookies can be stored, between layers of parchment, up to 3 days at a cool room temperature in airtight containers.

CHOCOLATE MINT WAFERS

MAKES ABOUT 50

Chill the cookies thoroughly, preferably overnight, before wrapping them as gifts.

- 1 cup all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting
- ½ cup unsweetened cocoa powder
- ¼ teaspoon baking powder
- ¼ teaspoon plus ⅛ teaspoon salt
- 6 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened
- ½ cup sugar
- 1 large egg
- ½ teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- 12 ounces semisweet or bittersweet chocolate, finely chopped
- ¼ teaspoon pure peppermint extract
- White nonpareils, for decorating (optional)

1. Whisk together flour, cocoa, baking powder, and ¼ teaspoon salt.

2. With an electric mixer on medium-high speed, cream butter and sugar until pale and fluffy. Beat in egg and vanilla. With mixer on low speed, gradually add flour mixture; mix just until combined. Cover with plastic wrap, and chill at least 1 hour, or up to overnight (dough will be very soft).

3. Preheat oven to 350°. Line two baking sheets with parchment paper. Form balls of dough (each equal to 1 teaspoon), and place on prepared sheets, 2 inches apart. Dip the bottom of a glass in flour, and flatten balls into 1½-inch rounds (about ¼ inch thick). Bake, rotating sheets halfway through, until slightly firm to the touch, 8 to 10 minutes. Immediately transfer cookies to a wire rack to cool completely.

4. Combine chocolate, peppermint extract, and remaining ⅛ teaspoon salt in a large heatproof bowl set over (not in) a pan of simmering water. Heat, stirring occasionally, until smooth, 2 to 3 minutes; remove from heat.

5. Replace parchment on baking sheets. Holding each cookie across the tines of a fork, dip in chocolate to coat completely, then tap underside of fork on side of the bowl to allow excess chocolate to drip off. Place on prepared sheet, and repeat until all cookies are coated. Decorate with nonpareils, if desired. Refrigerate until chocolate has hardened, at least 1 hour. Cookies can be refrigerated up to 5 days, between layers of parchment, in an airtight container.

roll a yule log

THE YULE LOG IS BELIEVED TO HAVE originated centuries ago as part of a celebration of the winter solstice, where it served as a symbol of warmth. The most classic, bûche de Noël (see opposite), relies on equal parts artistry and basic baking skills to transform a rolled cake into a woodland delight, with the most common garnish, meringue mushrooms, adding to the effect. More modern versions dispense with ceremony and may be simply dusted with confectioners' sugar, as is the cranberry jelly roll on page 57. Yule logs typically begin with a sponge cake, which, thanks to beaten egg whites folded into the batter, bakes up sturdy but flexible and admirably holds its shape. After that, it's just a matter of filling, rolling, and decorating as desired. Your guests will likely think your creation too pretty to eat, but they'll be so glad they did.

BÛCHE DE NOËL

SEE RECIPE, PAGE 60

Featuring a triple-chocolate roulade (cake, filling, and frosting) and cocoa-dusted meringue mushrooms, this dessert doubles as an enchanting centerpiece. Chocolate shards are scattered on top to resemble bark; the "twigs" are sugar-coated rosemary sprigs.

CHARLES SCHILLER

PISTACHIO-CHOCOLATE FAUX BOIS YULE LOG

SEE RECIPE, PAGE 61

Faux bois, one of Martha's favorite design motifs, provides a captivating disguise for a frozen cake log filled with pistachio ice cream. To make the "bark," a graining rocker is used to imprint white chocolate "knots" on a smooth sheet of dark chocolate.

SANG AN

CRANBERRY JELLY ROLL

SEE RECIPE, PAGE 62

A few easy tweaks make this simple roll instantly appropriate for the holidays. Cranberry jam replaces more common flavors in the filling; greenery and sugared cranberries serve as festive garnishes.

CHRISTOPHER BAKER

PEPPERMINT YULE LOG

SEE RECIPE, PAGE 63

What would a selection of Christmas sweets be without the appearance of a candy cane? Here red velvet cake, fluffy white frosting, and crushed peppermints are assembled into a crowd-pleasing yule log. A little peppermint mouse lends a touch of whimsy.

GINGERBREAD ROLL

SEE RECIPE, PAGE 62

This roulade delivers holiday spirit in every slice. Brandy flavors the custardike filling—an Italian specialty called *semifreddo* ("partially frozen")—and highly spiced gingerbread cake by way of a simple syrup brushed over the top before it's filled and rolled.

VICTOR SCHRAGER

roll a yule log

BÛCHE DE NOËL

MAKES ONE 13-INCH LOG

The meringue mushrooms can be made up to two days in advance, and the génoise and mousse the day before assembling.

- Chocolate Génoise (recipe follows)
- Chocolate Mousse (recipe follows)
- Chocolate Ganache (recipe follows)
- 4 ounces bittersweet chocolate, finely chopped
- Meringue Mushrooms (recipe follows)
- Sugared Rosemary, for garnish (page 63)
- Confectioners' sugar, for dusting
- Cocoa powder, for dusting

1. To assemble log, unroll génoise and place, still on towel, on a baking sheet. Gently spread chocolate mousse evenly over cake, leaving a 2-inch border on one long side. Reroll cake (without towel), starting from other long side, using towel to help roll. Cover with plastic wrap; chill until firm, about 1 hour.

2. Place log, seam side down, on a serving platter; tuck strips of parchment under the edges to keep platter clean while decorating.

3. With an electric mixer on medium speed, whip ganache until it is the consistency of soft butter. Using a serrated knife, cut a 1- to 2-inch wedge off each end of log at a 45-degree angle, for branches. With an offset spatula, gently spread a thin layer of ganache over log. Attach one branch, cut side up, to top of log and one to its side. Gently spread ganache over log (including branches), using the spatula to form barklike ridges. Chill.

4. Place bittersweet chocolate in a heatproof bowl set over (not in) a pan of simmering water, stirring until melted and smooth. Gently spread melted chocolate ⅛ inch thick over a parchment-lined baking sheet. Chill until cold, 10 to 15 minutes. Roll parchment back and forth until chocolate splinters; sprinkle evenly over log. Chill until ready to serve.

5. Before serving, arrange meringue mushrooms and sugared rosemary on and around log. Dust with confectioners' sugar and cocoa.

Chocolate Génoise

MAKES ONE 12-BY-17-INCH CAKE

The cake can be rolled, wrapped in plastic, and kept at room temperature up to a day.

- 5 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted, plus more for pan
- ⅓ cup sifted unsweetened cocoa powder, plus more for dusting
- ⅔ cup sifted cake flour (not self-rising)
- Pinch of baking soda
- 7 large eggs
- ¾ cup sugar
- 2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract

1. Preheat oven to 350°. Butter a 12-by-17-inch rimmed baking sheet. Line with parchment paper. Butter paper, and dust with cocoa; tap out excess. Into a medium bowl, sift together flour, cocoa, and baking soda.

2. Combine eggs, sugar, and vanilla in a mixing bowl set over (not in) a pan of simmering water; whisk until mixture is warm to the touch and sugar has dissolved. Remove from heat. With an electric mixer on high speed, whisk until mixture is thick, pale, and tripled in volume, about 6 minutes.

3. In three batches, sift flour mixture over egg mixture, folding in after each addition. While folding in last addition, pour in melted butter; fold in thoroughly.

4. Gently spread batter evenly in prepared pan, smoothing top with an offset spatula. Tap pan against counter to remove air bubbles. Bake until cake is springy to the touch, 15 to 20 minutes. Transfer pan to a wire rack to cool 5 minutes.

5. Run a sharp knife around the sides of cake, and invert onto a kitchen towel dusted with cocoa. Starting at a long side, roll cake into a log, incorporating towel. Let cool completely, seam side down.

Chocolate Mousse

MAKES ENOUGH FOR ONE 17-INCH LOG

- 4 ounces semisweet chocolate, finely chopped
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into small pieces
- 4 large eggs, separated
- Pinch of cream of tartar
- ½ cup heavy cream

1. Combine chocolate and butter in a heatproof bowl set over (not in) a pan of simmering water, stirring occasionally, until melted and smooth. Transfer mixture to a large bowl. Whisk in egg yolks, combining well. Let cool to room temperature.

2. With an electric mixer on medium-high speed, whisk egg whites with cream of tartar just until stiff peaks form. Whisk one-third of the whites into chocolate mixture; gently fold in remainder.

3. With a clean electric mixer, whip cream until soft peaks form, and fold into chocolate mixture. Cover with plastic wrap, and chill at least 1 hour, or up to overnight.

NOTE: *The egg yolks in this recipe are not fully cooked. It should not be prepared for pregnant women, babies, young children, the elderly, or anyone whose health is compromised.*

Chocolate Ganache

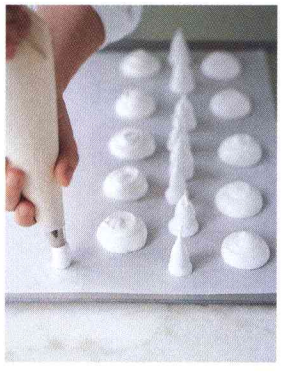
MAKES ENOUGH FOR ONE 17-INCH LOG

- 6 ounces bittersweet or semisweet chocolate, finely chopped
- 1 cup heavy cream

Place chocolate in a bowl. In a small saucepan, heat cream until steaming and bubbles begin to

MAKING THE MERINGUE MUSHROOMS

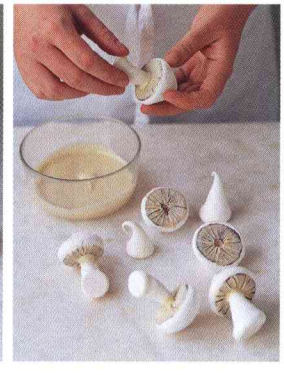
We also used these decorative sweets to garnish the frosted fruitcake on page 107.



Pipe meringue into the shapes of the caps and stems, placing each about an inch apart. Bake as directed.

Spread dark chocolate onto the underside of the caps, then cover with white chocolate.

Use a toothpick to carve lines in the chocolate to resemble the gills. Make a hole in centers of caps with a sharp knife.



To attach stems, dip tip of each into white chocolate, then secure to hole in center of cap.

WENDELL T. WEBBER

appear around edges; pour over chocolate. Let stand 5 minutes, then stir until smooth. Chill until cold but not solid, stirring occasionally.

Meringue Mushrooms

MAKES ABOUT 30

For more instructions, see the how-to on the opposite page.

- Swiss Meringue (recipe follows)
- 2 ounces bittersweet chocolate, finely chopped
- 3 ounces white chocolate, finely chopped

1. Preheat oven to 200°. Line two baking sheets with parchment paper. Using a large pastry bag fitted with a large round tip (such as Ateco #806), pipe meringue onto parchment, forming domes 1 to 2 inches in diameter. Pipe a stem shape for each cap separately.

2. Bake 1 hour, then reduce oven to 175°. Continue baking until meringues are completely dry to the touch but still white, 45 to 60 minutes more. Remove from oven. Let cool.

3. Place bittersweet chocolate in a heatproof bowl set over (not in) a pan of simmering water; stir occasionally, until completely melted. Using an offset spatula, gently spread bottoms of caps with chocolate; let set.

4. Melt white chocolate in another heatproof bowl in the same manner; let cool slightly. Gently spread white chocolate over dark chocolate, and use a toothpick to create lines from center of cap to edges. Let set.

5. Using a sharp knife, poke a small hole in center of each coated mushroom cap. Dip pointed end of each mushroom stem in melted white chocolate (reheat over simmering water, if necessary); insert stem into hole in center of cap. Let set. Mushrooms should be kept in an airtight container in a cool, dry place until ready to use, up to 2 days.

Swiss Meringue

MAKES 4 CUPS

- 4 large egg whites
- 1 cup sugar
- Pinch of cream of tartar
- ½ teaspoon pure vanilla extract

1. Combine egg whites, sugar, and cream of tartar in the heatproof bowl of an electric mixer set over (not in) a pan of simmering water, whisking constantly, until sugar has dissolved and whites are warm to the touch, about 3 minutes. Rub mixture between your fingers to test; it should be completely smooth.

2. Attach bowl to mixer. Starting on low speed and gradually increasing to high, whisk until meringue is cool and stiff and glossy peaks form, about 10 minutes. Add vanilla; mix until combined. Use immediately.

PISTACHIO-CHOCOLATE FAUX BOIS YULE LOG

MAKES ONE 12-INCH LOG

- 5 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 5 tablespoons unsweetened cocoa powder, plus more for dusting
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 5 large eggs, separated, room temperature
- ¾ cup sugar
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- Vegetable-oil cooking spray
- 3 pints pistachio ice cream, beaten until spreadable
- Chocolate Wood-Grain (recipe follows)
- Chocolate Leaves, for garnish (optional; recipe follows)

1. Preheat oven to 350°. Coat a 12-by-17-inch rimmed baking sheet with cooking spray. Line with parchment paper; spray paper. Dust with cocoa; tap out excess. Into a small bowl, sift together flour, cocoa, baking powder, and salt.

2. With an electric mixer on medium speed, whisk yolks and half the sugar until thick and pale. Beat in vanilla. In another mixing bowl, with a clean mixer, whisk egg whites until soft peaks form. Slowly add remaining sugar; beat on medium-high speed until stiff peaks form. Fold egg whites into yolk mixture in three batches; add flour mixture with last batch.

3. Gently spread batter evenly in prepared pan, smoothing top with an offset spatula. Tap pan against counter to remove air bubbles. Bake until cake is springy to the touch, 15 to 20 minutes. Transfer pan to a wire rack to cool 5 minutes.

4. Run a sharp knife around the sides of the cake, and invert onto a kitchen towel dusted with cocoa. Starting at a short side, roll into a log, incorporating towel. Let cool completely, seam side down.

5. Unroll log; gently spread ice cream evenly over cake, leaving a ½-inch border on all sides. Reroll (without towel). Arrange, seam side down, on a parchment-lined baking sheet; freeze until ice cream is firm, at least 1 hour (or up to overnight, covered with plastic

MAKING THE CHOCOLATE WOOD-GRAIN

Time the preparation of the chocolate wood-grain so it is ready when you remove the ice cream–filled cake from the freezer in step six of the pistachio-chocolate yule log recipe.

Coat graining rocker with melted white chocolate, then paint stripes on acetate (top). Pour bittersweet chocolate over chilled white chocolate, then quickly but gently spread with an offset spatula, keeping white chocolate intact (bottom).

Begin by tucking one short end of the coated acetate under the frozen log, with the chocolate side facing cake.

Drape the acetate over the log, making sure it covers the log in a smooth layer. Finish by tucking other end of acetate under.

wrap). Run a serrated knife under hot water, and pat dry (for neat slicing). Trim ends.

6. Wrap log in chocolate wood-grain (for more instructions, see page 61). With chocolate side facing log, tuck one short end of chocolate-coated acetate under log while lifting other end up and over log, being careful not to let chocolate touch the log until the sheet is ready to be tucked under at other side. Return to freezer. Let stand until the chocolate has hardened, about 10 minutes.

7. When ready to serve, remove log from freezer. Carefully peel off acetate; gently break off ends of chocolate wrapping to line up with ends of log. Garnish with chocolate leaves, if desired.

Chocolate Wood-Grain

MAKES ENOUGH TO COVER ONE 12-INCH LOG

You will need a graining rocker, a decorating tool used to make faux bois, and a thin sheet of acetate. Both are available at most hardware and paint-supply stores. For more instructions, see the how-to on page 61.

- 3 ounces white chocolate, finely chopped
- 6 ounces bittersweet chocolate, finely chopped

1. Cut a thin piece of acetate into a 13½-by-16-inch rectangle, and place on a baking sheet, with a long side facing you. Place white chocolate in a heatproof bowl set over (not in) a pan of simmering water, stirring until melted and smooth. Coat surface of graining rocker well with a thick layer of white chocolate. Starting at the right side and working from top to bottom of acetate sheet, rock coated tool back and forth while dragging it in one swift motion to make a vertical striation. Continue making striations until entire sheet is covered. Chill until set, 5 to 10 minutes.

2. Meanwhile, temper bittersweet chocolate: Heat two-thirds of the chocolate in another heatproof bowl set over (not in) a pan of barely simmering water until it registers 118° on a candy thermometer. Remove bowl from heat, and add remaining chocolate; stir with a flexible spatula (avoid using a wooden spoon, which can impart other flavors) until chocolate cools to 84°. Remove unmelted pieces; discard. Return bowl to pan; stir until chocolate reaches 88° to 90°.

3. Pour bittersweet chocolate over chilled white chocolate. Quickly and gently spread evenly over entire surface with an offset spatula. (Do not spread it too much, or white chocolate will smear.) Use immediately.

Chocolate Leaves

MAKES 8 TO 10

Lemon leaves are available at most florists. The chocolate leaves can be refrigerated up to one day.

- 8 to 10 pesticide-free lemon leaves
- 2 ounces bittersweet chocolate, finely chopped

1. Gently clean lemon leaves with a damp paper towel. Let dry on a baking sheet.

2. Temper chocolate: Heat two-thirds of the chocolate in a heatproof bowl set over (not in) a pan of barely simmering water until it registers 118° on a candy thermometer. Remove bowl from heat, and add remaining chocolate; stir with a flexible spatula (avoid using a wooden spoon, which can impart other flavors) until chocolate cools to 84°. Remove unmelted pieces; discard. Return bowl to pan; stir until chocolate reaches 88° to 90°.

3. Using a pastry brush, paint veiny underside of leaves generously with chocolate, covering entire surface. Place painted leaves, chocolate side up, on a parchment-lined baking sheet. Chill until chocolate is firm, about 10 minutes.

4. Starting from stem ends, carefully peel lemon leaves from chocolate, and discard. Transfer chocolate leaves to a clean parchment-lined baking sheet, and chill until ready to use.

CRANBERRY JELLY ROLL

MAKES ONE 12-INCH LOG

- ½ cup plus 2 tablespoons sifted cake flour (not self-rising), plus more for dusting
- 3 tablespoons finely ground toasted blanched almonds
- ⅛ teaspoon salt
- 3 large whole eggs plus 2 egg yolks
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted
- 1 cup confectioners' sugar, sifted, plus more for dusting
- 8 ounces fresh or frozen (unthawed) cranberries
- 1 pound cream cheese, softened
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- Vegetable-oil cooking spray
- Sugared Cranberries, for garnish (page 63)

1. Preheat oven to 400°. Lightly coat a 12-by-17-inch rimmed baking sheet with cooking spray. Line with parchment paper; spray paper. Dust with flour; tap out excess. In a bowl, whisk together flour, ground almonds, and salt.

2. Combine eggs, yolks, and ½ cup granulated sugar in a heatproof mixing bowl set over (not in) a pan of simmering water; whisk until sugar has dissolved and mixture is warm to the touch. Remove from heat; with an electric mixer on medium-high speed, whisk 2 minutes. Raise speed to high; whisk until mixture is pale and thick, about 4 minutes more.

3. Sift flour mixture over egg mixture; carefully fold with a large flexible spatula. When almost incorporated, pour butter down side of bowl; gently fold to combine.

4. Gently spread batter in prepared pan, smoothing top with an offset spatula. Tap pan against counter to remove air bubbles. Bake until golden brown and springy to the touch, 7 to 8 minutes. Transfer to a wire rack to cool 5 minutes.

5. Run a sharp knife around sides of cake, and invert onto a kitchen towel dusted with confectioners' sugar. Dust top of cake with confectioners' sugar. Starting at a short side, roll cake into a log, incorporating towel. Let cool completely, seam side down.

6. Meanwhile, make the jam: Cook cranberries and remaining ½ cup granulated sugar in a small saucepan over medium heat, stirring until sugar has dissolved. Continue to cook until cranberries have broken down and liquid has begun to evaporate, 5 to 7 minutes. Let cool 5 minutes. Puree in a food processor until smooth; let cool completely.

7. With an electric mixer on medium-high speed, beat cream cheese and confectioners' sugar until light and fluffy; add vanilla, and beat 30 seconds more.

8. Unroll log; spread with jam, leaving a ½-inch border on all sides. Spread cream-cheese mixture over jam. Reroll cake (without towel); wrap with towel to cover. Chill 30 minutes, or up to 3 hours. Trim ends with a serrated knife. Before serving, dust with confectioners' sugar. Garnish with sugared cranberries.

GINGERBREAD ROLL

MAKES ONE 12-INCH LOG

- 6 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted, plus more for pan and parchment
- 1¼ cups all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting
- 1½ teaspoons ground ginger
- 1½ teaspoons ground cinnamon
- ¼ teaspoon ground cloves
- ¼ teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
- 1 cup packed dark-brown sugar
- 6 large eggs
- 1 tablespoon unsulfured molasses
- Confectioners' sugar, for dusting
- Calvados Soaking Syrup (recipe follows)
- Semifreddo (recipe follows)
- Sugared Cranberries and Rosemary, for garnish (recipe follows)
- Cranberry Sauce (recipe follows)

1. Preheat oven to 350°. Butter a 12-by-17-inch rimmed baking sheet; line with parchment paper. Butter parchment, and dust with flour; tap out excess. In a bowl, whisk together flour, ginger, cinnamon, cloves, and nutmeg.

2. Combine brown sugar and eggs in a mixing bowl set over (not in) a pan of simmering water, whisking until mixture is just warm to the touch, about 2 minutes. Remove from heat.

3. With an electric mixer on high speed, whisk until mixture is thick and pale, 6 to 8 minutes. Transfer to a large bowl. Fold in two-thirds of the flour mixture in two additions. Combine butter and molasses; add in a steady stream while folding in remaining flour mixture. Spread evenly in prepared pan, smoothing top with an offset spatula.

4. Bake until cake is springy to the touch and golden brown, about 14 minutes. Transfer to a wire rack to cool 5 minutes. Run a sharp knife around sides of cake, and invert onto a kitchen towel dusted with confectioners' sugar. Starting at a short side, roll cake into a log, incorporating towel. Let cool completely, seam side down.

5. Unroll log; brush generously with Calvados syrup. Quickly spread semifreddo mixture over surface to within 1 inch of long sides. Reroll (without towel); wrap in plastic. Freeze until firm, at least 5 hours or up to overnight.

6. Transfer log to refrigerator to soften, about 15 minutes. Remove towel. Run a serrated knife under hot water, and pat dry (for neat slicing). Trim ends. Garnish with sugared cranberries and rosemary. Serve with cranberry sauce alongside.

Calvados Soaking Syrup

MAKES 1 CUP

- ⅔ cup sugar
- ⅔ cup water
- 3 tablespoons Calvados or other brandy

Heat sugar and the water in a small saucepan over medium-high, stirring occasionally, until sugar is dissolved. Remove from heat. Let cool; stir in Calvados.

Semifreddo

MAKES ENOUGH FOR ONE 12-INCH LOG

- 6 large egg yolks
- ⅓ cup sugar
- ⅓ cup Calvados or other brandy
- 2 cups heavy cream

1. With an electric mixer on high speed, whisk yolks until pale and thick, 4 to 5 minutes. Gradually add sugar; beat until fluffy. Slowly add Calvados, beating to combine. Set bowl over (not in) a pan of simmering water. Whisk by hand until shiny and thick, about 8 minutes. Return to mixer; whisk on medium speed until cool, about 10 minutes.

2. In a chilled bowl, whip cream with a clean electric mixer until soft peaks form. Add one-fourth of the whipped cream to egg mixture; whisk to combine. Fold in remaining whipped cream. Transfer to a 9-by-13-inch metal pan. Cover with plastic wrap; freeze 3 to 4 hours.

Sugared Cranberries and Rosemary

MAKES ENOUGH TO GARNISH ONE LOG

- 1¼ cups sugar
- 1 cup water
- ½ cup fresh cranberries
- 12 sprigs rosemary

1. In a small saucepan, bring 1 cup sugar and the water to a boil over medium-high heat, stirring until sugar dissolves.

2. Pour simple syrup into a bowl; place remaining ¼ cup sugar in another one. Insert a toothpick into a cranberry. Dip cranberry into syrup, tap off any excess liquid, and roll in sugar. Set aside on parchment to dry; remove toothpick. Repeat.

3. Dip a rosemary sprig in syrup; tap off any excess liquid. Dip into sugar, and tap off excess. Set aside on parchment to dry. Repeat.

Cranberry Sauce

MAKES 1⅔ CUPS

- 8 ounces fresh or frozen (unthawed) cranberries
- ¼ cup plus 2 tablespoons sugar
- 2 strips (1-by-3-inch) orange peel
- 1 cinnamon stick
- 1½ cups water

Bring all ingredients to a boil in a small saucepan over high heat, stirring to dissolve sugar. Reduce heat to medium-low; cook until cranberries burst, 8 to 10 minutes. Remove and discard orange peel and cinnamon stick. Pass mixture through a food mill, then through a fine sieve, pressing with a flexible spatula to remove as much liquid as possible (discard any solids). Let cool completely.

PEPPERMINT YULE LOG

MAKES ONE 12-INCH LOG

To make the peppermint-mouse garnish, see the how-to, below.

- Unsalted butter, for pan
- ¼ cup all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting
- 6 large eggs, separated
- ¾ cup sugar
- 1 tablespoon red food coloring
- ¼ cup unsweetened cocoa powder (not Dutch process)
- Peppermint Frosting (recipe follows)
- Crushed peppermint candies (about 25 small round ones), for sprinkling

1. Preheat oven to 400°. Butter a 12-by-17-inch rimmed baking sheet; line with parchment paper. Butter parchment, and dust with flour; tap out excess.

2. With an electric mixer on high speed, whisk yolks until pale and thick, 4 to 5 minutes. Transfer to a medium bowl.

3. Using a clean bowl and mixer, whisk egg whites on medium speed until soft peaks form. Raise speed to medium-high. Gradually add sugar; beat until stiff peaks form. Gently whisk in food coloring by hand. Transfer mixture to a large bowl.

4. Fold beaten egg yolks into egg-white mixture. Sift cocoa and flour over top, and gently fold to combine. Spread in prepared pan, smoothing top with an offset spatula. Tap pan against counter to remove air bubbles.

5. Bake until cake is springy to the touch, about 10 minutes. Transfer to a wire rack to cool 5 minutes. Run a sharp knife around sides of cake, and invert onto a kitchen towel dusted with cocoa. Starting at a short side, roll cake into a log, incorporating towel. Let cool completely, seam side down.

6. Unroll log; using an offset spatula, spread with 2 cups frosting, leaving a ¼-inch border on all sides. Reroll cake (without towel). Trim ends with a serrated knife. Transfer, seam side down, to a serving platter. Spread with remaining frosting. Sprinkle with crushed candy. Cake can be kept up to 5 hours at room temperature before serving.

Peppermint Frosting

MAKES ABOUT 8 CUPS

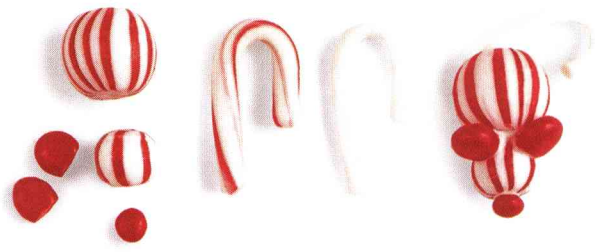
- 1¾ cups sugar
- ¼ cup water
- 2 tablespoons light corn syrup
- 6 large egg whites
- ½ teaspoon pure peppermint extract

1. Combine 1½ cups sugar with the water and corn syrup in a small heavy saucepan. Cook over medium heat, stirring frequently, until sugar has dissolved and mixture is clear, about 4 minutes. Without stirring, bring to a boil over high heat, occasionally washing down sides of pan with a wet pastry brush to prevent crystals from forming. Continue to boil until syrup registers 230° on a candy thermometer, about 5 minutes.

2. Meanwhile, with an electric mixer on medium speed, whisk egg whites until soft peaks form. With mixer running, gradually add remaining ¼ cup sugar. Reduce speed to low; carefully pour hot syrup down side of bowl. Raise speed to medium-high, and mix until cool, thick, and shiny, 12 to 15 minutes. Mix in peppermint extract. Use immediately.

MAKING THE PEPPERMINT MOUSE

Join small and large peppermint balls with royal icing (see recipe, page 24). For ears, trim two cinnamon candies using small scissors; attach with icing. Use a smaller cinnamon candy for the nose. For tail, hold a mini candy cane under warm running water to remove the stripes; attach with more icing. Let dry 2 hours.



VICTOR SCHRICKER

make a pudding

OLD-FASHIONED ENGLISH PUDDINGS HAVE long been a mainstay during the holidays, and for jolly good reason: They're uncommonly delicious. Unlike their American counterparts, these puddings—typically steamed in a sealed pot or baked in a water bath—turn out cakey, although they're just as luscious and moist. We've taken a few liberties with the term by including a trifle (another British concoction) and a mousse, both of which share a creamy consistency. So, along with an excellent example of the Christmas classic (see opposite), there's a bread pudding on page 66 that is chock-a-block with dried fruit, as well as velvety caramel pots de crème. Whether cakelike, silky smooth, or some combination of both, all of these "spoon desserts" offer delicious comfort in every bite.

STEAMED PERSIMMON PUDDING

SEE RECIPE, PAGE 70

This version has become a Christmas tradition in America as well as in England, where it originated. The simple garnish is made by drying sliced persimmons to resemble flowers.

KRIS KRINGLE BREAD PUDDING

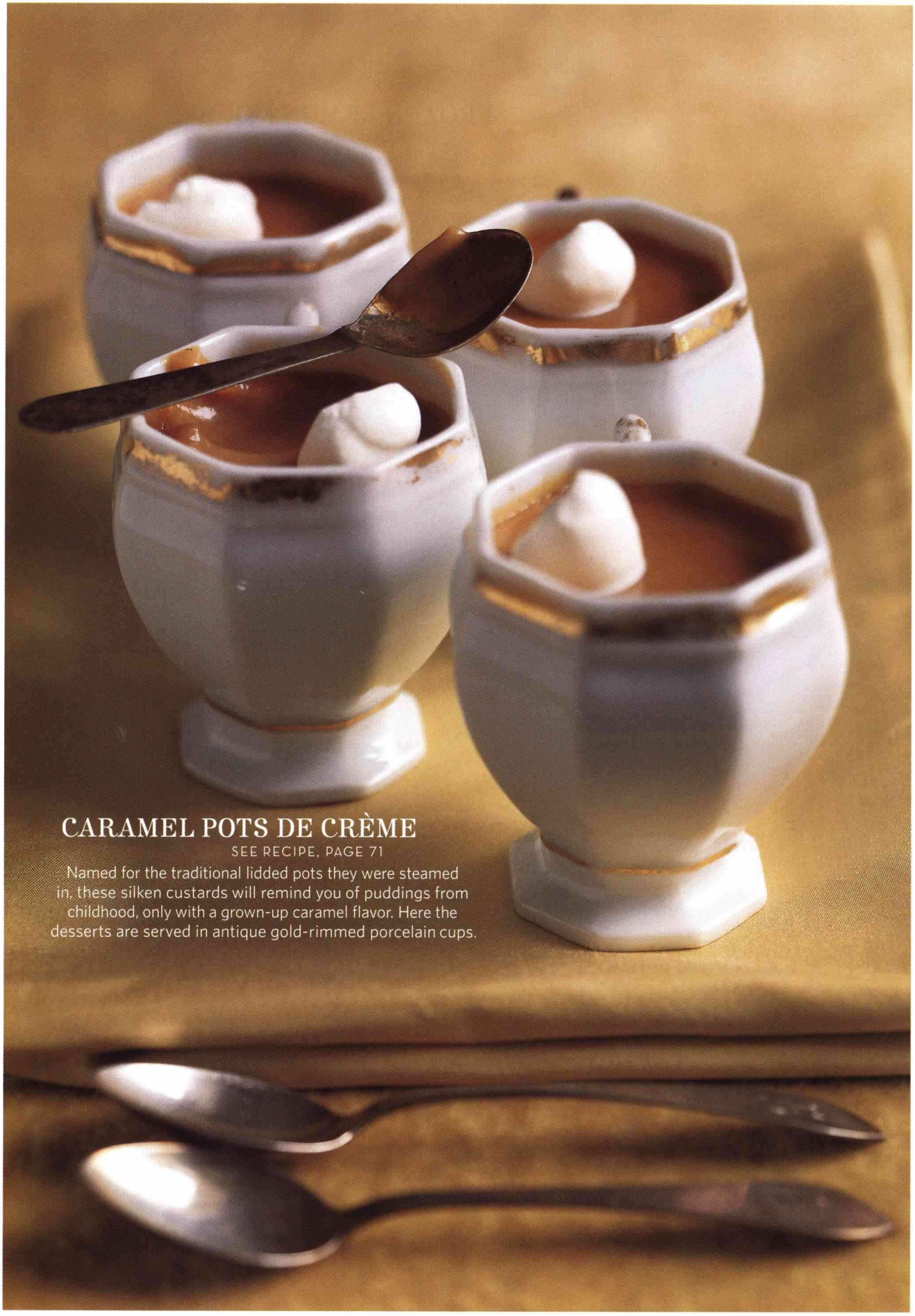
SEE RECIPE, PAGE 70

Martha is known—and celebrated—for sending earthenware bowls filled with this fluffy bread pudding to friends far and wide for Christmas, accompanied by jars of sour lemon sauce for serving alongside.

FROZEN LEMON MOUSSE

SEE RECIPE, PAGE 71

For a refreshing change of pace from the warm desserts of the season, try a cool, airy mousse. Because this one is frozen, you can prepare it ahead of time. To make them feel extra special, top the single-serve "puddings" with crème fraîche and candied lemon zest.



CARAMEL POTS DE CRÈME

SEE RECIPE, PAGE 71

Named for the traditional lidded pots they were steamed in, these silken custards will remind you of puddings from childhood, only with a grown-up caramel flavor. Here the desserts are served in antique gold-rimmed porcelain cups.

MARIA ROBLEDO

There's something very comforting about custards and puddings—both are lovely finales to a holiday meal.

—MARTHA

SHERRY TRIFLE WITH BRANDY CUSTARD

SEE RECIPE, PAGE 71

An English trifle is a delightful composition of flavors and textures. This one layers ladyfingers with raspberry jam and a brandy-infused pastry cream; crumbled amaretti cookies and toasted almonds make novel, crunchy additions.

LAURIE FRANKEL

make a pudding

STEAMED PERSIMMON PUDDING

SERVES 8 TO 12

- 1 cup pecans (about 4 ounces)
- 4½ tablespoons unsalted butter, softened, plus more for mold
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 2¼ teaspoons ground cinnamon
- ¾ teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
- ¼ teaspoon coarse salt
- ¼ cup Calvados or other brandy
- ¼ cup golden raisins
- 3 to 4 very soft Hachiya persimmons (see the Guide)
- 1 cup whole milk
- 1½ cups sugar
- 3 large eggs
- 1½ teaspoons pure vanilla extract
- 1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
- 1½ teaspoons baking soda
- 1½ tablespoons hot water
- ¼ cup finely chopped candied ginger
- Oven-Dried Persimmon Slices, for garnish (optional; recipe follows)
- Calvados Cream, for serving (recipe follows)

1. Preheat oven to 350°. Spread pecans in a single layer on a rimmed baking sheet; toast in oven until darkened and fragrant, tossing halfway through, 7 to 10 minutes. Let cool; coarsely chop.

2. Fill a large pot fitted with a steamer insert with enough water to come halfway up a 12-cup pudding mold (test this with an empty mold). Butter the mold. Into a bowl, sift together flour, spices, and salt.

3. Bring Calvados and raisins to a simmer in a small saucepan. Remove from heat; let stand 15 minutes. Drain raisins; discard liquid.

4. Meanwhile, slice tops off persimmons. Scoop out flesh, and press through a sieve into a bowl (you should have 1½ cups puree); discard skins. Whisk in milk.

5. With an electric mixer on medium speed, cream butter and sugar until pale and fluffy. Mix in eggs, vanilla, and lemon juice. Add persimmon mixture in two batches, scraping down sides of bowl after each addition. Dissolve baking soda in hot water; mix into butter mixture. Add flour mixture; beat until just combined. Stir in pecans, raisins, and ginger. Pour into prepared mold; cover with buttered parchment (or aluminum foil) and lid.

6. Bring water in prepared pot to a boil; reduce heat to a simmer. Carefully lower mold into steamer. Cover pot; steam until a cake tester inserted in middle of pudding comes out clean, 3½ to 4 hours, checking occasionally to make sure water level is maintained (add hot water as needed).

7. Transfer mold to a wire rack; remove lid and parchment. Let cool 15 minutes. Unmold pudding onto a cake stand or serving plate. Garnish with dried persimmon slices, if desired, and serve warm or at room temperature, with Calvados cream alongside.

Oven-Dried Persimmon Slices

MAKES 24 SLICES

- 6 firm Fuyu persimmons (see the Guide), stemmed and cut crosswise into ¼-inch-thick slices

Preheat oven to 250°. Arrange persimmon slices in a single layer on two baking sheets lined with Silpats. Bake until centers are dry and edges begin to curl, 1½ to 2 hours. Let cool completely. Slices can be refrigerated up to 2 days in an airtight container. Serve at room temperature.

Calvados Cream

MAKES ABOUT 1½ CUPS

- 1 cup heavy cream
- 1 tablespoon confectioners' sugar
- 2 tablespoons Calvados or other brandy

With an electric mixer, whip cream and confectioners' sugar until soft peaks form. Stir in Calvados. Use immediately.

KRIS KRINGLE BREAD PUDDING

MAKES 2; EACH SERVES 6

To make vanilla sugar, place vanilla beans and sugar in an airtight container; let stand one week, shaking occasionally.

- Unsalted butter, softened, for bowls
- ¾ cup vanilla sugar or granulated sugar, plus more for sprinkling
- 1⅓ cups Armagnac or other brandy
- 7 ounces assorted dried fruit, such as peaches, apricots, and pears
- 7 ounces pitted prunes
- 5 cups heavy cream
- 2 cups half-and-half
- 2 cinnamon sticks
- 2 vanilla beans, split lengthwise and seeds scraped to loosen
- Finely grated zest of 1 orange
- 12 large egg yolks
- 2 large loaves day-old brioche (1 pound each), cut into 1¼-inch cubes
- Sour Lemon Sauce, for serving (recipe follows)

1. Brush two 1½-quart ovenproof bowls with butter, and sprinkle with vanilla sugar; tap out excess. Bring Armagnac, dried fruit, and prunes to a simmer in a medium saucepan over medium-low heat. Cook, stirring occasionally, until fruit has softened and absorbed the liquid, about 10 minutes. Coarsely chop fruit.

2. Bring cream, half-and-half, vanilla sugar, cinnamon, vanilla beans and seeds, and zest to a boil in a large saucepan over medium-high heat, stirring occasionally. Remove from heat.

3. Lightly beat egg yolks in a medium bowl. Whisking constantly, gradually ladle half the hot-cream mixture into the yolks. Pour yolk mixture into saucepan with remaining cream mixture. Cook over medium heat, whisking constantly and scraping sides of pan, until mixture is thick enough to coat the back of a spoon, about 5 minutes. Pass custard through a fine sieve into a large bowl; discard solids.

4. Preheat oven to 350°. In another large bowl, combine brioche cubes and chopped fruit, reserving ½ cup fruit. Pour in custard; toss to combine. Divide bread mixture between prepared bowls. Top each with half the reserved fruit. Sprinkle with sugar. Let stand until bread has soaked up liquid, about 20 minutes.

5. Set bowls in a deep roasting pan. Brush two pieces of parchment paper with butter; place, butter side down, over bowls. Cover tightly with aluminum foil. Transfer pan to oven; add enough boiling water to come 3 inches up sides of bowls. Bake 1 hour. Uncover; bake until set, about 30 minutes more. Serve warm or at room temperature, with sour lemon sauce. Puddings can be refrigerated up to 3 days; let cool completely before covering with plastic wrap. If desired, reheat in a 350° oven, just until warm.

Sour Lemon Sauce

MAKES ABOUT 4 CUPS

- 1½ cups sugar
- 3 tablespoons plus 2 teaspoons cornstarch
- Pinch of salt
- 2½ cups water
- 7 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into small pieces
- Finely grated zest of 2 lemons, plus ½ cup fresh lemon juice

1. Bring sugar, cornstarch, salt, and the water to a boil in a medium saucepan over high heat, whisking constantly. Cook, continuing to whisk, until mixture thickens, about 5 minutes.

2. Stir in butter and lemon zest and juice. Cook, whisking, until smooth, 2 to 3 minutes more. Remove from heat; transfer to a bowl to cool completely. Sauce can be refrigerated up to 2 weeks in an airtight container.

FROZEN LEMON MOUSSE

SERVES 8

Ring molds may be purchased at specialty-cookware stores. You can also use an eight-inch springform pan to make a larger dessert.

- 8 to 10 lemons
- 2 cups sugar
- 2 large whole eggs, plus 8 egg yolks
- 1 cup (2 sticks) unsalted butter, cut into small pieces
- 1½ cups plus 2 tablespoons cold heavy cream
- Candied Lemon Zest (recipe follows)
- 8 ounces crème fraîche (1 cup)

1. Prepare a large ice-water bath. Juice 1 lemon; reserve juice. Juice additional lemons to yield 1 cup.

2. Make lemon curd: Place 1 cup lemon juice, sugar, whole eggs, yolks, and butter in a medium saucepan; whisk to combine. Cook over medium heat, whisking constantly, until mixture begins to boil, about 10 minutes.

3. Press curd through a fine sieve into a bowl set in the ice bath. Stir periodically until completely cool. Cover with plastic wrap, pressing directly onto surface to prevent a skin from forming; chill at least 1 hour, or up to 3 days.

4. With an electric mixer, whip 1½ cups heavy cream until soft peaks form. Reserve ½ cup lemon curd for sauce; add remaining lemon curd to whipped cream, folding gently until well combined.

5. Place 8 ring molds (each 3 inches in diameter and 2¼ inches high) on a rimmed baking sheet. Divide mousse among molds, filling each with about ¾ cup. Freeze until firm, at least 4 hours (or up to 3 days, covered tightly with plastic wrap).

6. Drain candied lemon zest; reserve syrup. Make the sauce by whisking ⅓ cup syrup with the reserved ½ cup lemon curd and juice of 1 lemon. Place frozen mousse on plates; let sit 4 to 5 minutes before removing molds. Meanwhile, with an electric mixer, whisk crème fraîche and remaining 2 tablespoons cream until soft peaks form. To serve, gently remove molds, and spoon lemon sauce around mousse; top with crème fraîche, and garnish with candied zest.

Candied Lemon Zest

MAKES ENOUGH TO GARNISH 8 SERVINGS

- 4 lemons, well scrubbed
- 2 cups sugar
- 1 cup water

1. Remove zest from lemons with a vegetable peeler, keeping pieces long (see photo, below). Use a very sharp knife to remove white pith, then cut zest into a fine julienne. Place julienned zest in a small bowl; cover with boiling water. Let stand 30 minutes; drain.

2. Bring sugar and 1 cup water to a boil in a small saucepan over medium-high heat, stirring until sugar is dissolved. Add julienned zest; reduce heat to medium-low, and cook 10 minutes. Remove from heat. Cover, and let stand overnight. Zest can be refrigerated in syrup up to 2 weeks in an airtight container.

CARAMEL POTS DE CRÈME

MAKES 6

- ¾ cup sugar
- 1½ cups heavy cream
- 1 cup milk
- 1 vanilla bean, split lengthwise and seeds scraped to loosen
- 5 large egg yolks
- ¼ teaspoon salt

1. Preheat oven to 300°. Place six 4-ounce ramekins or custard cups in a roasting pan.

2. Cook ½ cup sugar in a medium saucepan over medium heat, without stirring, until sugar is caramelized and golden brown, about 3 minutes. Swirl pan, dissolving unmelted sugar; reduce heat to low.

3. Slowly whisk in 1 cup cream and the milk; add vanilla bean and seeds. Increase heat to medium high, and bring to a boil; remove pan from heat.

4. In a bowl, whisk the remaining ¼ cup sugar with the egg yolks and salt; continue whisking until pale yellow. Slowly add the hot-cream mixture to the egg mixture, whisking constantly. Pass custard through a fine sieve into a large liquid measuring cup; discard solids.

5. Using a tablespoon or a small ladle, skim the surface to remove any air bubbles. Pour about ½ cup liquid into each ramekin. Fill roasting pan with boiling water to within 1 inch of ramekin tops. Cover roasting pan tightly with aluminum foil, and poke small holes in two opposite corners for vents.

6. Carefully transfer pan to oven; bake until custards are just set, about 35 minutes. Remove foil; transfer ramekins to a wire rack to cool completely. Cover with plastic wrap; refrigerate at least 1 hour, or up to 2 days.

7. When ready to serve, use an electric mixer to whip remaining ½ cup cream until soft peaks form. Add a dollop of whipped cream to each custard.

SHERRY TRIFLE WITH BRANDY CUSTARD

SERVES 10 TO 12

Toast sliced almonds on a rimmed baking sheet in a 350-degree oven until light golden, five to eight minutes, tossing once.

- 3 cups milk
- 9 large egg yolks
- ¾ cup sugar
- 4 tablespoons plus 2 teaspoons all-purpose flour
- ⅛ teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- 3 tablespoons brandy
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 14 ladyfingers, halved lengthwise
- ¾ cup raspberry jam (9 ounces)
- 1 cup cream sherry
- 1 cup sliced almonds, toasted, plus ¼ cup more for topping
- 16 amaretti (Italian almond cookies), broken (about 1¼ cups)

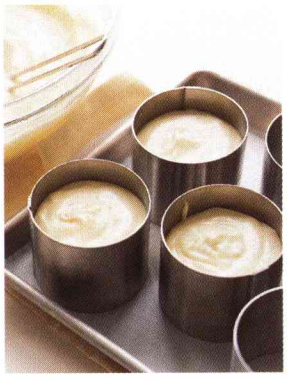
1. Prepare an ice-water bath. Heat milk in a large saucepan until scalding; remove from heat. With an electric mixer on medium-high speed, whisk yolks and sugar until mixture is pale and thick. On low speed, whisk in flour and salt. Gradually mix in half the warm milk. Pour yolk mixture into remaining milk in saucepan. Whisking constantly, bring to a boil over medium heat. Cook, stirring, until thickened, about 2 minutes. Pass pastry cream through a fine sieve into a bowl. Transfer to ice-water bath; let cool, stirring occasionally. Stir in vanilla and brandy. Cover with plastic wrap, pressing directly onto surface to prevent a skin from forming; chill at least 1 hour, or up to 3 days.

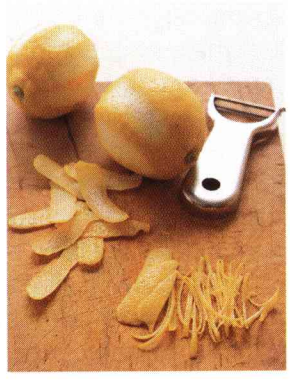
2. With an electric mixer, whisk cream just until stiff peaks form. Fold into pastry cream. Place 7 ladyfinger halves in bottom of a 12-cup trifle dish; spread with one-quarter jam. Drizzle in one-quarter sherry. Spoon one-quarter pastry cream on top. Sprinkle with one-third each almonds and amaretti. Repeat layering 3 more times. Sprinkle top with remaining ¼ cup almonds. Refrigerate, covered tightly, at least 3 hours, or up to overnight.

MAKING FROZEN LEMON MOUSSE

FOR MOUSSE: Set ring molds on a rimmed baking sheet, then fill almost to the top with mousse.

FOR GARNISH: Using a Y-type vegetable peeler, remove lemon zest in strips, leaving bitter white pith behind. Then cut into very fine strips with a sharp knife.





package the candy

THE HOLIDAYS MEAN GIFTS GALORE. If you're looking to give something extra-special, consider creating candies from scratch. Truffles, pralines, and other scrumptious confections are so rich and indulgent, even a small amount makes a big impression (whether wrapped up as presents or served as part of dessert). Most candies can be produced in large quantities; the recipe for gingerbread caramels should yield enough to satisfy everyone on your list. A few, like the chocolate bark and nut clusters, are supremely easy to prepare. All the candies that follow are a cinch to wrap: Use pretty paper, ribbons, and cupcake liners to dress up the boxes and bundles. Or fashion paper into cones or envelopes to custom-fit each batch. The resulting packages make memorable—and much appreciated—gifts for neighbors, coworkers, and any other lucky recipients.

CHOCOLATE TRUFFLES

SEE RECIPES, PAGE 78

Three different flavors—Champagne, bourbon-pecan, and Irish coffee—make a delightful set. To create the sleeves, wrap two layers of tissue paper (patterned and solid) around a clear box, then fold under edges; secure with a matching ribbon, and tuck in a sprig of artificial greenery.

LAURIE FRANKEL

CHOCOLATE-ORANGE PEANUT BARK

SEE RECIPE, PAGE 78

Shards of dark chocolate flecked with chopped peanuts and orange zest fill a gift tin. Parchment paper edged with pinking shears serves as a simple lining; additional slips of parchment help keep the layers separate.

LAURIE FRANKEL (THIS PAGE AND OPPOSITE)

Little packages of homemade candies tied with beautiful trimmings and tags make the best assembly-line gifts. –MARTHA

CLUSTERS AND CANDIED NUTS

SEE RECIPES, PAGE 78

Flavored nuts are a natural choice at holiday time, and here are three delicious variations on the theme. Plain cellophane bags become festive with wide satin ribbons or decorative cupcake liners; secure each one at the top with twine and a handwritten label.

PRALINES
SEE RECIPES, PAGE 79
A specialty of the American South, pralines make heartwarming gifts. Choose among these four versions, or make a batch of each. Paper and ribbon in the same palette unify an assortment of purchased and handmade gift boxes.
ROLLED HAZELNUT PRALINES
PISTACHIO PRALINE BARS
michelle
thomas
MARCONA-ALMOND AND FLEUR DE SEL PRALINES
Laura
PECAN-SOUR CREAM PRALINES
Laura
James

GINGERBREAD CARAMELS

SEE RECIPE, PAGE 79

A favorite store-bought candy is more suited to the season when it's made by hand and flavored with gingerbread spices. The cones and ribbons are fashioned from red construction paper and affixed with nostalgic clip-art labels (page 119).

package the candy

CHOCOLATE-CHAMPAGNE TRUFFLES

MAKES ABOUT 3 DOZEN

- ½ cup heavy cream
- 8 ounces semisweet chocolate, finely chopped
- ¼ cup plus 1 tablespoon Champagne
- 1 tablespoon Cognac or other brandy
- Coarse sanding sugar, for rolling

1. In a small saucepan, bring the cream to a boil. Immediately pour hot cream over the chocolate in a medium bowl; stir until smooth. Stir in the Champagne and Cognac. Chill until thick and set but still pliable, about 2 hours.

2. Line rimmed baking sheets with parchment or waxed paper. Using a 1-inch melon baller or ice-cream scoop, form mixture into balls. Transfer to prepared sheets. Chill 15 minutes.

3. Place sanding sugar in a shallow bowl. Using your hands, roll each ball until completely smooth, then roll in sanding sugar to coat (if truffles become too soft to roll, return to refrigerator until firm). Return to baking sheets (replace parchment paper). Cover with plastic wrap, and chill until truffles are set, at least 30 minutes, or up to 3 days.

BOURBON-PECAN TRUFFLES

MAKES ABOUT 3 DOZEN

- 1 cup heavy cream
- 10 ounces semisweet chocolate, finely chopped
- 2 tablespoons bourbon
- 1 cup finely chopped pecans (5 ounces)

1. In a medium saucepan, bring the cream to a boil. Immediately pour hot cream over the chocolate in a medium bowl; stir until smooth. Stir in bourbon. Chill until thick and set but still pliable, about 2 hours.

2. Line rimmed baking sheets with parchment or waxed paper. Using a 1-inch melon baller or ice-cream scoop, form mixture into balls. Transfer to prepared sheets. Chill 15 minutes.

3. Place pecans in a shallow bowl. Using your hands, roll each ball until completely smooth, then roll in pecans, pressing lightly to adhere (if truffles become too soft to roll, return to refrigerator until firm). Return to baking sheets (replace parchment paper). Cover with plastic wrap, and chill until truffles are set, at least 30 minutes, or up to 3 days.

IRISH-COFFEE TRUFFLES

MAKES ABOUT 4 DOZEN

- 15 ounces bittersweet chocolate, finely chopped
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into small pieces
- ¼ cup plus 2 tablespoons heavy cream
- 2 tablespoons light corn syrup
- 2 tablespoons plus 1½ teaspoons packed dark-brown sugar
- 2 large egg yolks
- 6 tablespoons Irish whiskey
- 1 tablespoon pure coffee extract (see the Guide)
- ⅛ teaspoon coarse salt
- Good-quality unsweetened cocoa powder, for rolling
- Vegetable-oil cooking spray

1. Coat a 5-by-9-inch loaf pan with cooking spray; line with plastic wrap, leaving a 2-inch overhang on long sides. Place chocolate and butter in a large heatproof bowl set over (not in) a pan of simmering water; stir until melted. Remove from heat.

2. In a small saucepan, bring cream, corn syrup, and brown sugar to a boil, stirring until sugar has dissolved. Immediately pour over chocolate mixture; whisk until smooth. Whisk in yolks, whiskey, coffee extract, and salt. Pour into prepared pan. Cover with plastic wrap. Chill until thick and set but pliable, about 4 hours.

3. Line rimmed baking sheets with parchment or waxed paper. Using a 1-inch melon baller or ice-cream scoop, form mixture into balls. Transfer to prepared sheets. Chill 15 minutes.

4. Place cocoa in a shallow bowl. Using your hands, roll each ball until completely smooth, then roll in cocoa to coat (if truffles become too soft to roll, return to refrigerator until firm). Return to baking sheets (replace parchment paper). Cover with plastic wrap, and chill until truffles are set, at least 30 minutes, or up to 3 days.

NOTE: *The eggs in this recipe are not fully cooked. It should not be prepared for pregnant women, babies, young children, the elderly, or anyone whose health is compromised.*

CHOCOLATE-ORANGE PEANUT BARK

MAKES ABOUT SIXTEEN 3-INCH PIECES

- 1 navel orange
- 1 pound bittersweet or semisweet chocolate, finely chopped
- 1⅓ cups coarsely chopped unsalted peanuts (about 5 ounces)
- ¼ teaspoon coarse salt

1. Line a 12-by-17-inch rimmed baking sheet with aluminum foil; chill. With a vegetable peeler, remove zest from the orange in long pieces (reserve orange for another use). With a sharp knife, cut zest into very fine strips, about 1 inch long.

2. Place chocolate in a large heatproof bowl set over (not in) a pan of simmering water; heat, stirring occasionally, until melted and smooth. Mix in half the zest and peanuts. Immediately pour onto prepared sheet; with a flexible spatula, spread into a 10-by-12-inch rectangle, about ¼ inch thick. (To help spread chocolate, rock baking sheet back and forth.) Sprinkle with remaining zest and nuts, and the salt.

3. Chill until firm, about 30 minutes. To serve, break into pieces. Bark can be refrigerated up to 3 days, between layers of parchment, in airtight containers.

CANDIED HAZELNUTS

MAKES ABOUT 6 CUPS

This recipe makes vanilla-flavored candied nuts. See below for espresso variation.

- 6 cups unblanched hazelnuts (about 1¾ pounds)
- 1 vanilla bean, split lengthwise
- 2 cups sugar
- 4 large egg whites
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 2 tablespoons coffee-flavored liqueur, such as Kahlúa

1. Preheat oven to 250°, with racks in upper and lower positions. Spread hazelnuts on two rimmed baking sheets. Toast in oven, stirring halfway through, until fragrant and skins begin to crack, about 20 minutes. Remove from oven. While nuts are still hot, place in a kitchen towel; rub to remove skins (some may remain). Let cool.

2. Scrape vanilla seeds into a small bowl. Stir in sugar. With an electric mixer on medium speed, whisk egg whites and salt until frothy. Pour in sugar mixture; whisk until thick and foamy. Whisk in liqueur. Fold in nuts with a flexible spatula. Spread on two Silpat-lined baking sheets.

3. Bake, stirring and rotating pans from top to bottom every 10 minutes, until nuts are golden, about 50 minutes. Let cool 10 minutes, then transfer to another baking sheet; let cool completely, about 6 hours. Nuts can be stored up to 5 days at room temperature in airtight containers.

Espresso Variation:

To make espresso hazelnuts, fold in ½ cup plus 2 tablespoons freshly ground espresso beans just before adding hazelnuts.

WHITE-CHOCOLATE CLUSTERS

MAKES 20

- ¾ cup assorted dried fruit, such as raisins, cherries, cranberries, and chopped apricots
- ¾ cup toasted assorted nuts, such as almonds, pecans, walnuts, hazelnuts, pistachios, and macadamia nuts
- 12 ounces white chocolate, finely chopped

1. Line a rimmed baking sheet with waxed paper. In a small bowl, combine assorted dried fruit and toasted nuts.

2. Heat white chocolate in a heatproof bowl set over (not in) a pan of simmering water, stirring until smooth.

3. Drop level tablespoons of melted chocolate onto prepared sheet, 2 inches apart. Mound fruit-nut mixture on top, pressing in gently. Chill until set, 15 to 20 minutes. Clusters can be refrigerated up to 3 days, between layers of parchment, in airtight containers.

PECAN-SOUR CREAM PRALINES

MAKES ONE DOZEN 1-INCH PRALINES

- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
- ½ cup plus 2 tablespoons granulated sugar
- ½ cup plus 2 tablespoons packed dark-brown sugar
- ½ teaspoon coarse salt
- ¼ cup plus 2 tablespoons sour cream
- 1 tablespoon bourbon
- 1½ teaspoons pure vanilla extract
- 1⅓ cups pecans (about 5 ounces), toasted

1. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Melt butter in a medium saucepan over low heat. Stir in both sugars, salt, and sour cream. Raise heat to medium-low, and cook, whisking frequently, until sugar has dissolved. Raise heat to medium-high. Cook, stirring frequently and scraping sides of pan with a heatproof flexible spatula, until mixture reaches 240° (soft-ball stage) on a candy thermometer, 10 to 15 minutes.

2. Remove from heat. Carefully stir in bourbon and vanilla (mixture will spatter). Let cool, without stirring, 2 minutes. Add pecans, and beat vigorously with a spoon until slightly opaque but still creamy, about 2 minutes.

3. Drop spoonfuls onto prepared sheet. (If mixture in pan begins to harden, stir in 1 teaspoon hot water, as often as needed; if it becomes runny, stir until firm.) Let stand until set, about 30 minutes. Pralines can be stored up to 3 days, between layers of parchment, at room temperature in airtight containers.

ROLLED HAZELNUT PRALINES

MAKES ABOUT 1½ CUPS

The caramel cools quickly, so it's best to divide the ingredients in half and prepare the pralines in two batches. Wear protective gloves while making these candies.

- Vegetable oil
- 1 cup sugar
- ¼ cup water
- 1½ cups blanched hazelnuts (6 ounces), toasted

1. Lightly coat a Silpat or a piece of parchment paper with oil, and place on a heatproof surface. Bring sugar and the water to a boil in a small saucepan over medium-high heat, gently swirling pan and washing down sides with a wet pastry brush to prevent crystals from forming. Boil, without stirring, until mixture turns pale amber, about 8 minutes.

2. Remove from heat, and stir in hazelnuts. Pour mixture onto center of prepared surface. Working quickly and using gloved hands lightly coated with oil, roll each nut between your palms until completely coated and smooth. Let cool completely. (If caramel mixture begins to harden before you roll all the hazelnuts, transfer mat or parchment with mixture to a baking sheet; place in a 375° oven until pliable again. You can do this only once.) Pralines can be stored up to 2 weeks, between layers of parchment, at room temperature in airtight containers.

MARCONA-ALMOND AND FLEUR DE SEL PRALINES

MAKES 1 POUND

Wear protective gloves while making these candies.

- Vegetable oil
- 1 cup sugar
- ¼ cup water
- ¾ cup raw Marcona almonds (4 ounces) or regular blanched almonds
- 1½ teaspoons fleur de sel

1. Lightly coat a Silpat or a piece of parchment paper with oil, and place on a heatproof surface. Bring sugar and the water to a boil in a small saucepan over medium-high heat, gently swirling pan and washing down sides with a wet pastry brush to prevent crystals from forming. Boil, without stirring, until mixture turns pale amber, about 8 minutes.

2. Remove from heat, and stir in almonds. Pour mixture onto center of prepared surface, and sprinkle with fleur de sel. Let stand just until the edges are cool enough to handle. Working quickly and using gloved hands lightly coated with oil, pull pieces of caramel and almonds away from the center until caramel starts to harden and you are able to pull long, thin pieces before they break away. Transfer to a parchment-lined baking sheet to cool completely. (If caramel mixture begins to harden, transfer mat or parchment with mixture to a baking sheet; place in a 375° oven until pliable again. You can do this only once.) Pralines can be stored up to 2 weeks, between layers of parchment paper, at room temperature in airtight containers.

PISTACHIO PRALINE BARS

MAKES ABOUT THIRTY 2-INCH SQUARES

- Vegetable oil
- 2 cups sugar
- ¼ cup water
- 2 cups finely chopped shelled raw pistachios (10 ounces)
- ½ teaspoon coarse salt

1. Lightly coat a 9-by-13-inch rimmed baking sheet with oil. Line with parchment paper, leaving a 2-inch overhang on long sides. Bring sugar and the water to a boil in a small saucepan over medium-high heat, gently swirling pan and washing down sides with a wet pastry brush to prevent crystals from forming. Boil, without stirring, until mixture turns medium amber, 10 to 12 minutes.

2. Remove from heat, and stir in pistachios and salt. Pour mixture onto prepared sheet, and quickly spread evenly with an offset spatula. Let cool until just set but still soft, about 2 minutes. Lifting it by the parchment overhang, invert warm praline onto a cutting board; use a sharp knife to loosen parchment, and remove. Immediately cut praline into bars using a serrated knife lightly coated with oil. Let cool completely. Bars can be stored up to 2 weeks at room temperature in airtight containers.

GINGERBREAD CARAMELS

MAKES ABOUT 12 DOZEN

Caramels should be individually wrapped in cellophane (see the Guide) or waxed paper to prevent them from sticking to one another.

- 4 cups heavy cream
- 2 cups light corn syrup
- 4 cups sugar
- ¾ cup (1½ sticks) unsalted butter, cut into small pieces
- ½ cup unsulfured molasses
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- ¾ teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ¾ teaspoon ground ginger
- ¾ teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
- ¼ teaspoon ground cloves
- Vegetable-oil cooking spray

1. Lightly coat a 12-by-17-inch rimmed baking sheet with cooking spray. Line with parchment paper, leaving a 2-inch overhang on short sides; spray paper.

2. In a large pot over high heat, bring cream, corn syrup, sugar, butter, and molasses to a boil, stirring until sugar has dissolved. Continue to cook over medium-high heat, stirring frequently, until mixture reaches 248° (firm-ball stage) on a candy thermometer, about 20 minutes.

3. Remove from heat, and stir in vanilla, salt, and spices. Immediately pour onto prepared sheet, without scraping pot. Let stand, uncovered, 24 hours at room temperature (do not move pan).

4. Generously coat a large cutting board with cooking spray. Lifting it by the parchment overhang, invert caramel onto the cutting board; use a sharp knife to loosen parchment, and remove. Cut into 1-by-1¼-inch pieces. Wrap each in cellophane or waxed paper. Caramels can be stored up to 1 month in airtight containers.

prepare a tart

IF YOU THINK OF A TART AS A PIE WITH a low, sleek profile, it's easy to imagine its role at the holiday table. The process for making them is the same (and, in some cases, even easier for tarts), with a few simple modifications. Most often, the tart pan does all the work in creating the characteristic fluted edge (see opposite); the pan's removable bottom also allows for easy unmolding and a more refined presentation. Experiment with pans in various shapes and sizes: A rectangular pear tart is a pretty holiday-dinner dessert, while the tiny chocolate-caramel ones on page 87 might best be enjoyed on New Year's Eve. Or forgo the pan entirely and construct a free-form tart like the apple-cranberry version on page 83; it's a striking example of how a tart can showcase flavors in a way no double-crust pie could do.

CHOCOLATE-MACADAMIA NUT TART

SEE RECIPE, PAGE 88

Slice into this golden dimpled tart and—voilà!—you'll discover a layer of chocolate inside. The airy filling puffs up around the macadamia nuts for a cookielike result. It's rich, delicious, and certainly memorable.

CITRUS TART

SEE RECIPE, PAGE 88

Citrus makes a bright—and seasonally appropriate—choice for the holidays. Here it flavors a glistening tart in which a coat of English marmalade studded with orange peel tops off a baked lemon-and-orange custard.

CHRISTOPHER BAKER

APPLE-CRANBERRY PHYLLO TART

SEE RECIPE, PAGE 88

In this utterly modern tart, the crust is quickly formed with store-bought phyllo dough, and the apple slices arranged just so. Cranberries, often paired with apples, add bursts of color.

CHOCOLATE-ESPRESSO KAHLÚA TART

SEE RECIPE, PAGE 88

With a press-in-the-pan cookie-and-hazelnut crust and liqueur-laced mousse filling, this deep, dark, chocolate dessert is impossible to resist. Serve it with cups of strong coffee or espresso, or snifters of Kahlúa.

JONATHAN LOVEKIN

CARROT-SPICE TARTLETS

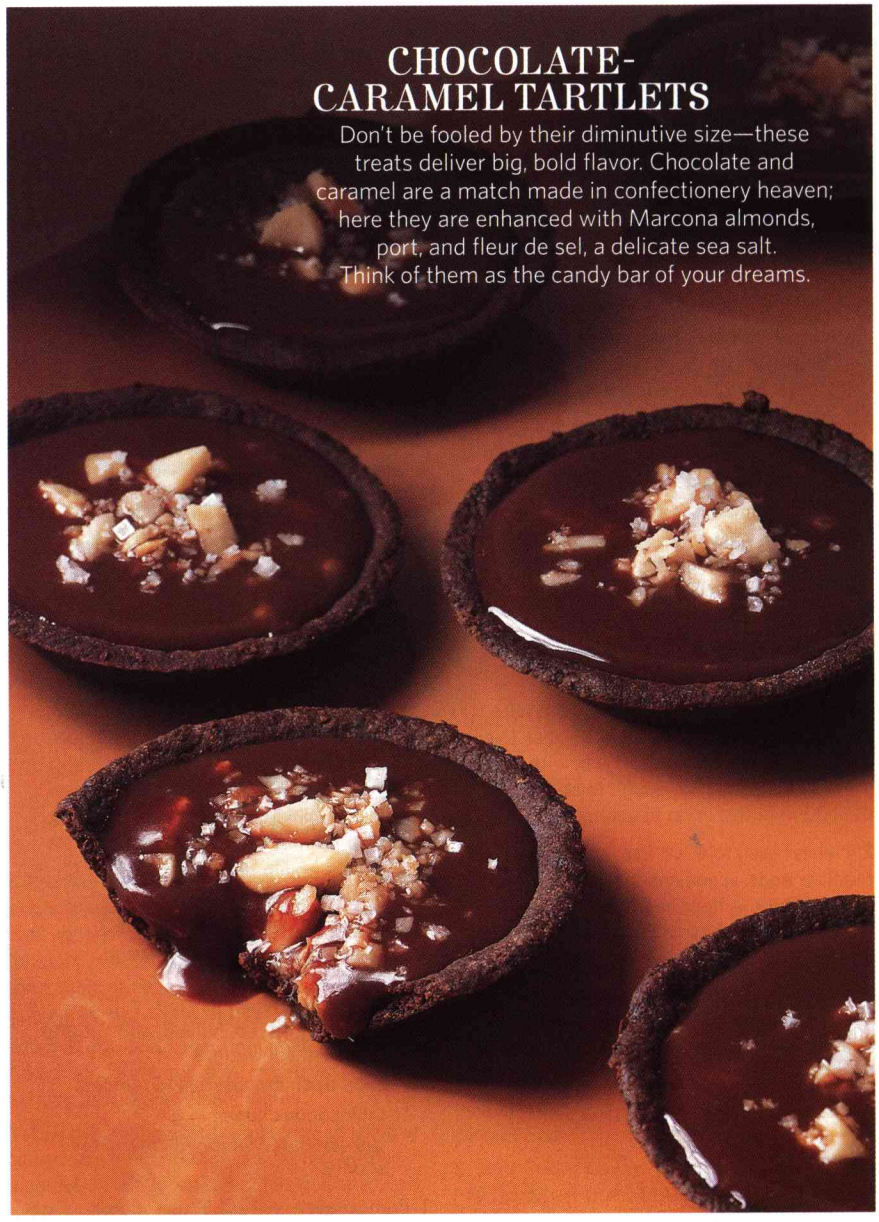
SEE RECIPE, PAGE 89

Their subtle sweetness and affinity for spices make carrots a natural choice for baking more than just cakes and muffins. Here they provide an unexpected flavor for tarts that offer another surprise: crushed gingersnaps in the pastry crust.

PEAR TART WITH ALMOND CRUST

SEE RECIPE, PAGE 89

An easy-to-assemble tart seems instantly more special when baked in a rectangular shape; this one layers pears and frangipane, a classic almond filling.



CHOCOLATE-CARAMEL TARTLETS

Don't be fooled by their diminutive size—these treats deliver big, bold flavor. Chocolate and caramel are a match made in confectionery heaven; here they are enhanced with Marcona almonds, port, and fleur de sel, a delicate sea salt. Think of them as the candy bar of your dreams.

CHOCOLATE-CARAMEL TARTLETS »

MAKES 40

If you can't find fleur de sel, use another type of sea salt, such as Maldon.

FOR THE TART SHELLS:

- 2½ cups all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting
- ½ cup unsweetened cocoa powder
- ½ cup sugar
- ¾ teaspoon fleur de sel
- ½ cup (1 stick) cold unsalted butter, cut into small pieces
- 3 large eggs, lightly beaten

FOR THE FILLING:

- 1 cup sugar
- ½ cup water
- ½ cup heavy cream
- 3 tablespoons ruby or tawny port
- 2 tablespoons cold unsalted butter, cut into small pieces
- 1 ounce bittersweet chocolate (preferably 70 percent cacao), finely chopped
- 1 cup salted Marcona almonds (4 ounces; or roasted salted blanched almonds), finely chopped
- Fleur de sel, for sprinkling

1. Make tart shells: In a food processor, pulse flour, cocoa, sugar, and fleur de sel until combined. Add butter; pulse until mixture resembles coarse meal. With machine running, add eggs through the feed tube; process just until dough comes together. Turn out dough onto a work surface; shape into a disk. Wrap in plastic. Chill 30 minutes, or up to overnight.

2. On a lightly floured surface, roll out dough to about ⅛ inch thick. Using a 3-inch cookie cutter, cut 10 rounds from dough. Transfer remaining dough to a flour-dusted baking sheet; chill.

3. Fit dough rounds into ten round tartlet pans (each 2¼ inches in diameter). Trim edges of dough flush with rims. (Chill scraps on baking sheet.) Chill shells 30 minutes.

4. Preheat oven to 350°. Prick bottoms of dough all over with a fork. Bake until firm, about 12 minutes. Transfer pans to a wire rack to cool completely before unmolding.

5. Working in batches of ten and using remaining dough (reroll scraps), repeat steps 2, 3, and 4 to make 40 shells in all.

6. Make caramel filling: Heat sugar and the water in a small saucepan over medium-high, stirring until sugar has dissolved. Continue to cook, without stirring, until syrup comes to a boil, occasionally washing down sides of pan with a wet pastry brush to prevent crystals from forming. Let boil, swirling pan to color evenly, until syrup is dark amber. Remove from heat.

7. Carefully stir in cream and port (mixture will spatter). Add butter and chocolate; stir until melted and mixture is smooth. Let cool until slightly thickened but still pourable, about 20 minutes.

8. Sprinkle about 1 teaspoon chopped almonds over bottom of each tart shell. Spoon caramel mixture into shells, filling almost to the top. Sprinkle with remaining almonds and fleur de sel. Chill until ready to serve, up to 3 hours.

GENTL & HYERS

prepare a tart

CHOCOLATE-MACADAMIA NUT TART

MAKES ONE 11-INCH TART

This tart is best baked several hours in advance and allowed to cool completely.

- ½ cup all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting
- 1 recipe Pâte Sucrée (page 17)
- 2 large eggs
- 1 cup sugar
- ½ tablespoon bourbon
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ¾ cup (1½ sticks) unsalted butter, melted and cooled
- 6 ounces semisweet chocolate, finely chopped
- 2½ cups unsalted whole macadamia nuts (10 ounces)

1. On a lightly floured surface, roll out pâte sucrée to a 14-inch round, about ⅛ inch thick. Fit into an 11-inch round tart pan with a removable bottom; trim dough flush with rim. Chill 30 minutes, or up to overnight.

2. Preheat oven to 400°. In a large bowl, whisk together eggs, sugar, and bourbon until combined. Whisk in flour and salt, then whisk in butter. Stir in chocolate until combined. Pour into chilled tart shell. Arrange nuts on top.

3. Bake 10 minutes. Reduce oven to 350°, and continue baking until crust and filling are golden, about 35 minutes more. If tart is browning too quickly, tent with aluminum foil. Transfer pan to a wire rack to cool completely.

CITRUS TART

MAKES ONE 9-INCH TART

This tart is equally good cold or at room temperature. To chill, let cool completely, then refrigerate two hours or up to overnight.

- All-purpose flour, for dusting
- 1 recipe Pâte Sucrée (page 17)
- Finely grated zest of 1 orange (about 1 tablespoon) plus ½ cup fresh orange juice (from 1 to 2 oranges)
- Finely grated zest of 2 lemons (about 1 tablespoon) plus ½ cup fresh lemon juice (from 2 to 3 lemons)
- ¾ cup sugar
- ¼ cup plus 2 tablespoons crème fraîche or sour cream
- 6 large eggs
- ½ cup orange marmalade (with long strips)

1. On a lightly floured surface, roll out pâte sucrée to about ⅛ inch thick. Fit into a 9-inch round tart pan with a removable bottom; trim dough flush with rim. Chill 30 minutes, or up to overnight.

2. Preheat oven to 375°. Prick bottom of dough all over with a fork. Carefully line tart shell with parchment paper, pressing it into corners; fill with pie weights or dried beans. Bake until light golden around edges, about 20 minutes. Remove parchment and weights; continue baking until crust is firm and light golden in center, about 10 minutes more. Transfer to a wire rack to cool 15 minutes.

3. Whisk together zests, juices, and sugar in a bowl. Whisk in crème fraîche until combined. Whisk in eggs until well blended. Pour into tart shell. Bake until filling is set, 25 to 30 minutes (do not let it brown). Transfer pan to a wire rack to cool completely.

4. Place marmalade in a small saucepan; stir over low heat until melted. Let cool a few minutes, then spread evenly over filling.

APPLE-CRANBERRY PHYLLO TART

MAKES ONE 12-BY-17-INCH TART

- ½ cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, melted, plus more for baking sheet
- 4 sheets phyllo dough (each 12 by 17 inches), thawed if frozen
- 2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
- 5 tablespoons pure maple syrup, plus more for serving
- 4 to 5 apples, such as Gala, Fuji, or Pink Lady, cored, halved, and cut into ¼-inch-thick wedges
- 1½ cups fresh cranberries (5 ounces)
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- Unsweetened whipped cream, for serving

1. Preheat oven to 400°. Brush a baking sheet with butter. Lay 1 phyllo sheet on prepared baking sheet; brush with about 1 tablespoon butter, and sprinkle with some cinnamon. Repeat layering with remaining phyllo sheets and more butter and remaining cinnamon. Bake until crisp and golden brown, about 10 minutes. Meanwhile, core and halve apples; cut into ¼-inch-thick wedges.

2. Remove phyllo from oven; brush top gently with 2 tablespoons maple syrup. Place a row of apple wedges along one short side, with rounded edges facing out. Make a second row of apples next to the first row, overlapping the rows slightly and staggering the wedges so that the rounded edges of the second row fall between the rounded edges of the first row. Cut wedges as needed to fill gaps at ends of each row. Scatter cranberries over top. Drizzle with remaining butter and 3 tablespoons maple syrup; sprinkle with sugar.

3. Bake until apples are just tender (they should offer little resistance when pierced with the tip of a sharp knife) and cranberries have softened, about 25 minutes. Transfer sheet to a wire rack to cool slightly.

4. Cut tart into squares. Drizzle with maple syrup, and serve warm, with whipped cream on the side.

CHOCOLATE-ESPRESSO KAHLÚA TART

MAKES ONE 11-INCH TART

FOR THE CRUST:

- 2 cups hazelnuts (9 ounces)
- 1⅓ cups finely ground chocolate wafers (about 22)
- ½ teaspoon instant-espresso powder
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ½ cup (1 stick) plus 2 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted and cooled

FOR THE MOUSSE:

- ½ cup Kahlúa (coffee-flavored liqueur)
- ½ cup unsweetened cocoa powder
- 2 large eggs, separated
- 1 teaspoon instant-espresso powder
- Pinch of salt
- 4 ounces bittersweet chocolate, finely chopped
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 6 tablespoons sugar

1. Make crust: Preheat oven to 375°. Spread hazelnuts in a single layer on a rimmed baking sheet; toast until skins split and flesh turns deep golden brown, tossing halfway through, 10 to 12 minutes. Remove from oven; reduce oven to 325°. While still warm, rub nuts in a clean kitchen towel to remove skins (some will remain). Let cool completely, then finely grind in a food processor.

2. Stir together ground nuts, cookie crumbs, espresso powder, salt, and butter. Press into bottom and up sides of an 11-inch round tart pan with a removable bottom. Chill 30 minutes.

3. Place tart pan on a baking sheet; bake until firm to the touch, about 20 minutes. Transfer to a wire rack to cool completely.

4. Make mousse: In a bowl, whisk together Kahlúa, cocoa, egg yolks, espresso powder, and salt. Melt chocolate and butter in a heatproof bowl set over (not in) a pan of simmering water. Whisk in liqueur mixture. Cook, whisking, until mixture is thickened and registers 160° on an instant-read thermometer. Let cool completely.

5. With an electric mixer on medium speed, beat cream just to stiff peaks. Whisk egg whites and sugar in the heatproof bowl of an electric mixer set over (not in) a pan of simmering water. Cook, whisking, until sugar is dissolved and meringue registers 160° on thermometer.

6. Attach bowl with meringue to mixer. Whisk on medium speed until soft peaks form. Raise speed to high, and beat until peaks are stiff and glossy but not dry, and meringue is completely cool. Using a flexible spatula, gently but thoroughly fold chocolate mixture into meringue, then fold in whipped cream. Spread evenly in cooled tart shell. Chill until set, at least 1 hour, or up to overnight.

CARROT-SPICE TARTLETS

MAKES EIGHT 4-INCH TARTS

- 6 green cardamom pods
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
- ½ cup milk
- ½ cup heavy cream
- 1 teaspoon finely grated peeled fresh ginger
- 12 ounces carrots, peeled and cut into ¼-inch pieces (2½ to 3 cups)
- 1 cup sugar
- ⅛ teaspoon coarse salt
- 4 large eggs, lightly beaten
- ½ cup finely ground gingersnaps
- ½ recipe Pâte Brisée (page 17)
- Unsweetened whipped cream, for serving
- Ground cardamom, for dusting

1. Crush cardamom pods with the flat side of a large knife, just to split. Melt 1 tablespoon butter in a small saucepan over medium heat; add crushed cardamom. Cook until fragrant, about 3 minutes. Add milk, cream, and ginger; bring to a simmer, stirring to combine. Reduce heat to medium-low; cook 15 minutes, stirring occasionally. Remove from heat; let steep 30 minutes.

2. Melt remaining tablespoon butter in a large sauté pan over medium heat. Add carrots; cook, stirring occasionally, 2 minutes. Stir in sugar and salt. Cover pan; cook until carrots are tender when pierced with the tip of a sharp knife, about 8 minutes. Pour steeped-milk mixture through a fine sieve into pan with carrots; discard solids. Remove from heat; let cool slightly, about 5 minutes. Process carrot mixture in a food processor until completely smooth; transfer to a bowl.

3. Temper beaten eggs by whisking in up to ¾ cup carrot mixture, ¼ cup at a time, until eggs are warm to the touch. Pour warmed egg mixture into remaining carrot mixture; whisk until thoroughly combined. Let cool.

4. Meanwhile, lightly sprinkle ground gingersnaps on a work surface to form a large round, about 18 inches in diameter. Roll out pâte brisée on top of crumbs to ⅛ inch thick, turning over dough occasionally to coat both sides with cookie crumbs.

5. Using a 5-inch cookie cutter or tart-ring mold, cut out eight rounds from dough. Press rounds into eight 4-inch tartlet pans or pie plates; trim dough flush with rim. Prick bottom of dough all over with a fork. Chill 30 minutes.

6. Preheat oven to 375°. Line each tart shell with parchment paper, pressing into corners; fill with pie weights or dried beans. Bake until golden brown, about 30 minutes. Transfer to a wire rack. Remove pie weights and parchment. Let shells cool completely.

7. Divide filling evenly among shells. Bake until a cake tester inserted in centers comes out clean, 30 to 35 minutes. Serve warm with whipped cream dusted with ground cardamom.

PEAR TART WITH ALMOND CRUST

MAKES ONE 4-BY-13-INCH TART

With their colorful skins, red Bartlett pears look especially nice in this tart.

- ¾ cup whole blanched almonds (3 ounces)
- ½ cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, softened
- ½ cup sugar, plus more for sprinkling
- 1 large egg
- 2 tablespoons heavy cream
- ¼ teaspoon pure almond extract
- Almond Tart Shell (recipe follows)
- 1 ripe but firm red Bartlett or Comice pear, cored and cut into ¼-inch-thick slices
- Vanilla-Bean Crème Anglaise, for serving (recipe follows)

1. Preheat oven to 350°. Spread almonds in a single layer on a rimmed baking sheet; toast until light golden and fragrant, tossing halfway through, 7 to 10 minutes. Let cool completely, then finely grind in a food processor.

2. With an electric mixer on medium speed, cream butter and sugar until light and fluffy. Add ground almonds, egg, cream, and almond extract; beat until well combined.

3. Using a small offset spatula, spread filling in cooled tart shell. Arrange pear slices, overlapping them slightly, on top of filling. Generously sprinkle with sugar; place tart on a baking sheet. Bake until filling is slightly puffed and golden brown, about 35 minutes. Transfer to a wire rack to cool. Serve warm or at room temperature, with crème anglaise alongside.

Almond Tart Shell

MAKES ONE 4-BY-13-INCH SHELL

- ¼ cup whole blanched almonds
- 1 cup plus 2 teaspoons all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting
- ¼ teaspoon baking soda
- ⅛ teaspoon salt
- ½ cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, softened
- ½ cup sugar
- 1 large egg yolk
- ¼ teaspoon pure vanilla extract

1. Preheat oven to 350°. Spread almonds in a single layer on a rimmed baking sheet; toast until light golden and fragrant, tossing halfway through, 7 to 10 minutes. Let cool completely, then finely grind in a food processor.

2. In a small bowl, whisk together flour, baking soda, and salt. With an electric mixer on medium speed, cream butter and sugar until light and fluffy. Add ground almonds, egg yolk, and vanilla extract, and beat until well combined. With mixer on low speed, gradually add flour mixture, beating until just combined. Turn out onto a work surface; pat into a flattened rectangle. Wrap in plastic. Chill 1 hour, or up to overnight, or freeze up to 3 months (thaw before using).

3. On a lightly floured surface, roll out dough to a 6-by-16-inch rectangle, about ⅜ inch thick. Fit into a 4-by-13-inch rectangular tart pan with a removable bottom; trim dough flush with rim. Prick bottom of dough all over with a fork. Chill 30 minutes, or up to overnight.

4. Preheat oven to 350°. Place tart pan on a baking sheet; bake until crust starts to brown around the edges, 13 to 14 minutes. (Dough will be slightly puffed in spots.) Transfer to a wire rack; using a metal spatula, gently press on dough until it is smooth and flat. Let cool completely.

Vanilla-Bean Crème Anglaise

MAKES ABOUT 2 CUPS

- 4 large egg yolks
- ¼ cup sugar
- Pinch of salt
- 1 cup milk
- ¾ cup heavy cream
- 1 vanilla bean, split lengthwise

1. Prepare an ice-water bath. With an electric mixer on high speed, whisk together egg yolks, sugar, and salt until pale and very thick.

2. Combine milk and cream in a small saucepan; scrape in the vanilla seeds, and add the pod. Bring just to a boil. Remove from heat; discard pod.

3. With mixer on low speed, gradually pour half the hot-milk mixture into yolk mixture, then pour yolk mixture into remaining milk in saucepan. Cook over medium-low heat, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon, until thick enough to coat the back of the spoon and hold a line drawn by your finger, about 5 minutes. Pass mixture through a fine sieve into a bowl. Place bowl in ice-water bath, stirring occasionally, until chilled. Use immediately, or refrigerate, covered, up to 3 days. Gently whisk before using.

surprise the little ones

THE MOST WONDERFUL TIME OF THE year is especially so for children. There's excitement in the air, presents to wish for, and so many yummy things to eat. Why not make the season even more magical by creating a dazzling dessert, just for them? What girl or boy wouldn't be oh-so-delighted by a cake shaped like an igloo, with a playful pack of marzipan penguins sliding down its side, or by two favorites (frosted chocolate cupcakes and iced gingerbread cookies) combined in one delectable treat? And because kids are also enthusiastic kitchen helpers, invite them to assist in building cheery snowmen out of ice cream and candy (see opposite), or to sprinkle sparkling sugar over sufganiyot (jelly-filled doughnuts) for a Hanukkah celebration. Making these whimsical sweets is so much fun, you might just experience a little childlike joy yourself.

COCONUT SNOWMEN

SEE RECIPE, PAGE 98

It's quick work to make a quartet of edible snowmen: Roll three different-size balls of ice cream in coconut flakes, stack them, and insert licorice eyes, mouth, and buttons. A tiny marzipan carrot stands in for a nose; a toasted marshmallow atop a chocolate wafer cookie makes the "hat."

GENTL & HYERS

IGLOO CAKE

SEE RECIPE, PAGE 98

What to their wondering eyes should appear, but a flock of marzipan penguins bringing holiday cheer! This adorable igloo consists of buttercream blocks piped onto a chocolate-and-vanilla ice-cream cake. Dried-coconut "snow" and a cake stand trimmed with sugar-dusted paper icicles complete the polar landscape.

ANNA WILLIAMS

I always plan a fanciful holiday dessert just for kids. Their eyes never fail to light up when I bring it to the table. —MARTHA

ANNA WILLIAMS

CHOCOLATE-GINGERBREAD-HOUSE PETITS FOURS

SEE RECIPE, PAGE 99

Tiny houses cut and assembled from a chocolate-gingerbread sheet cake double as charming party treats. The snowcapped roofs are aglow with red-licorice chimneys. Serve on cute punched-out place cards with mugs of hot chocolate alongside.

CHOCOLATE CUPCAKES WITH GINGERBREAD TOPPERS

SEE RECIPE, PAGE 99

Kids and cupcakes go hand in hand, and miniature ones are just the right size. Top with tiny spice cookies cut into snowflakes and gingerbread men; try pumpkin or even turkey shapes for Thanksgiving.

"GLITTERED" SUFGANIYOT »

MAKES 2 DOZEN

If you're making the nondairy version of these doughnuts, reduce the amount of salt to ¾ teaspoon.

- 1 envelope (1 scant tablespoon) active dry yeast
- ½ cup granulated sugar
- 1 cup plus 2 tablespoons warm milk or soy milk (110°)
- 3½ cups all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting
- 1¼ teaspoons coarse salt
- 2 large eggs, lightly beaten
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter or margarine, melted and cooled
- Vegetable oil, for bowl and frying
- 1¼ cups confectioners' sugar, sifted
- 2 cups raspberry jam
- Blue sanding sugar, for decorating

1. Combine yeast, granulated sugar, and 1 cup milk. Let stand until foamy, about 8 minutes.

2. Whisk flour and salt in the bowl of a standing mixer fitted with the dough-hook attachment. Add yeast mixture, eggs, and butter, and beat on medium-low speed until dough is soft but not sticky, about 3 minutes.

3. On a lightly floured surface, knead dough until smooth and elastic, 3 to 4 minutes. Transfer to a large oiled bowl, and cover loosely with plastic wrap. Let rise in a warm, draft-free place until doubled in bulk, about 1½ hours.

4. Punch down the dough. Turn out onto a lightly floured surface; knead dough a few times, and roll out to ¼ inch thick. Cover with a kitchen towel, and let rest 5 minutes. Using a 2-inch cookie cutter, cut out rounds, and transfer to a lightly floured baking sheet. Reroll scraps, and cut out more rounds. Cover rounds with kitchen towel, and let rise slightly in a warm, draft-free place 20 minutes.

5. Meanwhile, heat 3 to 4 inches oil in a pot until it reaches 375° on a deep-fry or candy thermometer. Line a wire rack with paper towels. Working in batches of four or five, add rounds to oil, and fry, turning once, until golden and puffed, about 1 minute per side. Using a slotted spoon, transfer doughnuts to lined rack to cool completely.

6. Place a clean wire rack on parchment paper or a baking sheet. Spoon jam into a pastry bag fitted with a plain ½-inch tip (such as Ateco #804). Pierce a hole in the side of a doughnut with the tip, and squeeze in jam to fill (do not overfill). Place on rack. Repeat.

7. Whisk together confectioners' sugar and remaining 2 tablespoons milk in a shallow bowl. Holding filled doughnuts by their sides, gently dip tops into icing; return to rack. Immediately sprinkle with sanding sugar. Sufganiyot are best when served the same day (or store up to overnight at room temperature in airtight containers).

"GLITTERED" SUFGANIYOT

Sufganiyot are a traditional Hanukkah treat. Here they are iced and sprinkled with sanding sugar to make sparkling take-home treats. Arrange them in cupcake liners and package in small cellophane bags; fold over the tops, then seal with double-sided tape and finish with patterned paper trimmed with scalloping shears.

JOHNNY MILLER

surprise the little ones

COCONUT SNOWMEN

MAKES 4

To make these snowmen, you will need ice-cream scoops in three different sizes (1½-, 2½-, and 3½-inch). Shoestring licorice cut into small pieces can also be used for the buttons, eyes, and mouth.

- 2½ pints vanilla ice cream
- 2 packages (7 ounces each) sweetened shredded coconut
- Orange gel-paste food coloring
- 1 tablespoon marzipan (¼ ounce)
- 40 Sen-Sen licorice candies (see the Guide)
- 4 large marshmallows
- 4 chocolate wafer cookies
- Confectioners' sugar, for dusting

1. Line a baking pan that fits in your freezer with parchment paper. Use ice-cream scoops to form balls of ice cream, making four of each size; place on prepared pan. Chill in freezer 15 minutes.

2. Place coconut in a shallow bowl. Working with one ball at a time, remove ice cream from freezer, then roll in coconut to coat. Return to freezer. Tint marzipan with orange food coloring; form into small carrot shapes, using a paring knife to make ridges.

3. Remove a small ball of ice cream from freezer; use licorice for eyes and mouth and a marzipan carrot for the nose. Return to freezer; repeat.

4. Remove a medium-size ball from the freezer; arrange licorice in a row down the front for buttons. Return to freezer; repeat.

5. Remove all balls from freezer, and stack to create snowmen, pressing slightly to adhere. Return snowmen to freezer.

6. To make hats, roast marshmallows on skewers over a gas-burner flame, turning to color evenly. (Alternatively, place marshmallows on a baking sheet under the broiler, rotating every few seconds.) Place each toasted marshmallow on a chocolate wafer, and dust with confectioners' sugar. Place hats on snowmen just before serving.

IGLOO CAKE

MAKES ONE 8½-INCH DOME CAKE

- Unsalted butter, for baking sheets
- 1¼ cups unsweetened Dutch-process cocoa powder, plus more for pans
- 2½ cups all-purpose flour
- 2½ cups granulated sugar
- 2½ teaspoons baking soda
- 1¼ teaspoons baking powder
- 1¼ teaspoons salt
- 2 large whole eggs plus 1 egg yolk
- 1¼ cups warm water
- 1¼ cups low-fat buttermilk
- ½ cup plus 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1¼ teaspoons pure vanilla extract
- 1 quart chocolate ice cream
- 1½ quarts vanilla ice cream
- White-Chocolate Buttercream (recipe follows)
- 10 large marshmallows
- White, pale-blue, and silver sanding sugar, for decorating
- Marzipan Penguins (recipe follows)
- Finely shredded unsweetened coconut, for decorating
- Vegetable-oil cooking spray

1. Preheat oven to 350°. Butter two 12-by-17-inch rimmed baking sheets. Line with parchment paper; butter parchment. Dust with cocoa; tap out excess. Sift together cocoa, flour, granulated sugar, baking soda, baking powder, and salt into a mixing bowl. Add whole eggs, yolk, the warm water, buttermilk, oil, and vanilla. Mix on low speed until smooth.

2. Divide batter between prepared sheets. Bake until a cake tester inserted in the centers comes out clean, about 16 minutes. Transfer sheets to wire racks to cool 30 minutes. Run a sharp knife around edges, then invert onto racks to cool completely.

3. Coat a 9-inch (9-cup) ovenproof bowl with cooking spray. Line with plastic wrap, leaving a 2-inch overhang. Cut one cake layer crosswise into 4-inch-wide strips, and use to line bowl (there should be no gaps). Cut a 9-inch round from remaining cake layer; reserve.

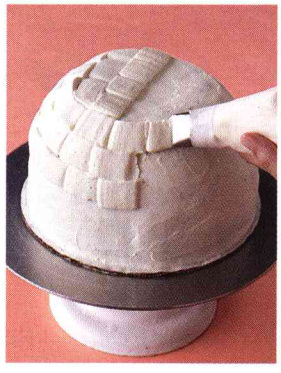
4. One at a time, beat ice creams with an electric mixer just until smooth. Spread 1 cup vanilla ice cream over cake in bowl; spread 1½ cups chocolate ice cream on top. Continue layering ice creams, alternating 1½ cups of each flavor, stopping ½ inch from rim. (If ice cream becomes too soft, freeze cake and the ice creams until firm again, about 10 minutes; stir beaten ice creams until smooth, if necessary.) Press cake round over ice cream. Wrap in plastic; freeze overnight.

5. Turn out cake onto a 9-inch cake board or a platter. Freeze 15 minutes. Spread a thin layer of buttercream over cake, and freeze until firm, about 15 minutes. Transfer remaining buttercream to a pastry bag fitted with a large basket-weave tip (such as Ateco #898). With smooth side of tip facing you, pipe 1-inch rectangles all over cake (pictured below). If cake begins to soften, freeze 15 minutes.

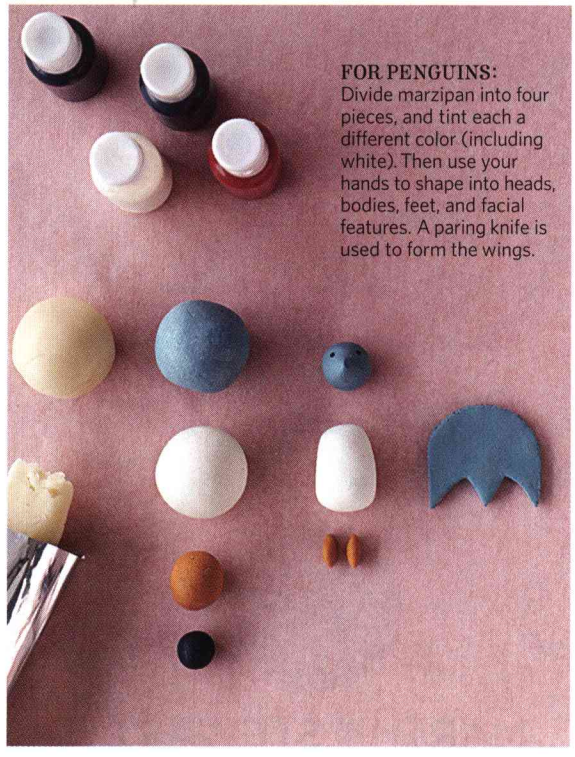
6. Trim one rounded side of each marshmallow to make flat; attach cut sides to cake in an inverted U shape to outline a "door." Using a smaller basket-weave tip (such as Ateco #895), pipe shorter rectangles over marshmallows. Sprinkle sanding sugars all over cake. Freeze until ready to serve, up to 1 day. Attach marzipan penguins to cake with toothpicks, and garnish with coconut "snow."

MAKING THE IGLOO CAKE

Even novice pipers will find it easy to produce the blocks of frosting on the cake. You may want to wear gloves when tinting the marzipan with food coloring.



FOR CAKE: A thin "crumb coat" of frosting provides a smooth surface for the piped-on frosting. Working from top to bottom, and turning cake as you work, pipe "blocks" so they overlap each other slightly.



FOR PENGUINS: Divide marzipan into four pieces, and tint each a different color (including white). Then use your hands to shape into heads, bodies, feet, and facial features. A paring knife is used to form the wings.

KARL JUENGEL

White-Chocolate Buttercream

MAKES ABOUT 9 CUPS

- 20 ounces white chocolate, finely chopped
- 12 large egg whites (or 1½ cups whipping-quality pasteurized egg whites)
- 1¾ cups plus 3 tablespoons sugar
- 2¼ cups (4½ sticks) unsalted butter, cut into 1-inch pieces, softened

1. Melt chocolate in a heatproof bowl set over (not in) a pan of simmering water, stirring until smooth. Remove from heat; keep warm.

2. Combine egg whites and sugar in a heatproof bowl of an electric mixer set over (not in) pan of simmering water. Whisk until sugar has dissolved and mixture reaches 110° on a candy thermometer. Attach bowl to mixer fitted with the whisk attachment; beat on high speed until fluffy and completely cool.

3. Switch to the paddle attachment. With mixer on medium-low speed, add butter, 2 pieces at a time, beating until combined after each addition. Beat in chocolate. Raise speed to high, and beat until smooth, about 5 minutes. Reduce speed to low; beat to eliminate air bubbles. Buttercream can be refrigerated up to 3 days, or frozen up to 1 month, in an airtight container; bring to room temperature, and beat on low speed until smooth.

Marzipan Penguins

MAKES 10

- 1 pound marzipan
- Blue, white, red, yellow, and black gel-paste food coloring

1. For each penguin, form four balls of marzipan: two golf-ball size, one half that size, and the remaining one-quarter that size (see how-to, opposite). Use food coloring to tint one large ball blue and the other white. Tint medium ball rust-orange (mix red and yellow). Tint small ball black.

2. Break off a piece of blue marzipan, and roll into a ½-inch ball for the head; pinch to form a beak. Use black marzipan to make eyes; attach to head. Shape white marzipan ball into a body (about 1¼ inches long). Use orange marzipan to make ½-inch-long feet. Roll out remaining blue marzipan to ¼ inch thick. Cut out shape for wings with a paring knife.

3. Gently press head onto body; attach feet. Wrap wings around back; smooth seam at neck. Penguins can be stored up to 2 weeks at room temperature in airtight containers.

CHOCOLATE-GINGERBREAD-HOUSE PETITS FOURS

MAKES 50

Petits fours should be served the same day they are assembled.

- 10 tablespoons (1¼ sticks) unsalted butter, softened, plus more for pan
- 3¼ cups all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting
- 1½ cups boiling water
- 1½ teaspoons baking soda
- ¾ cup unsweetened Dutch-process cocoa powder
- 4 teaspoons ground ginger
- 4 teaspoons ground cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
- ¾ teaspoon ground cloves
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- 1 cup packed dark-brown sugar
- 1½ cups unsulfured molasses
- 3 large eggs, room temperature
- Whipped Bittersweet Ganache (recipe follows)
- 2 red licorice wheels (see the Guide), unwound and cut into ¾-inch pieces
- Confectioners' sugar, for dusting

1. Preheat oven to 350°. Butter a 9-by-13-inch baking pan. Line bottom with parchment, and butter parchment. Dust with flour; tap out excess. Stir together the boiling water and baking soda. In a bowl, whisk together flour, cocoa, spices, salt, and baking powder.

2. With an electric mixer on medium-high speed, cream butter and brown sugar until pale and fluffy. Add molasses and eggs; beat until creamy, scraping down sides of bowl as needed. Reduce speed to low. Add flour mixture in three additions, alternating with the baking soda mixture; beat until combined. Raise speed to medium-high; beat 15 seconds.

3. Pour batter into prepared pan. Bake until a toothpick inserted into center of cake comes out clean, about 40 minutes. (Do not open oven before 35 minutes.) Transfer pan to a wire rack to cool 20 minutes. Run a sharp knife around edges of cake; invert onto rack. Remove parchment; reinvert cake (top side up) to cool completely. Cake can be wrapped in plastic and refrigerated up to 3 days.

4. Using a serrated knife, trim edges of cake to make straight. Cut cake into 1-inch cubes (at least 75). Cut 25 cubes into triangles. Spread ganache on long sides of triangles. Place a triangle on top of each remaining cube, frosting side down, for roofs. Dust with confectioners' sugar. Insert licorice in each roof for a chimney.

Whipped Bittersweet Ganache

MAKES ABOUT 1½ CUPS

- 8 ounces bittersweet chocolate, finely chopped
- 1 cup heavy cream

Place chocolate in a bowl. Bring cream to a simmer in a small saucepan; pour over chocolate, and let stand 5 minutes, then stir until smooth and combined. Let cool completely. Whisk until fluffy. Use immediately.

CHOCOLATE CUPCAKES WITH GINGERBREAD TOPPERS

MAKES 60 MINI CUPCAKES

Follow the instructions in the Gingerbread Icebox Cake (page 38) to roll, cut, and bake the cookie toppers, with these modifications: Roll out dough to just under ¼ inch thick, and use 1½-inch cookie cutters to cut out the shapes (instead of fluted rounds).

- 1½ cups all-purpose flour
- ¾ cup unsweetened Dutch-process cocoa powder
- 1½ cups sugar
- 1½ teaspoons baking soda
- ¾ teaspoon baking powder
- ¾ teaspoon salt
- 2 large eggs
- ¾ cup buttermilk
- 3 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- ¾ cup warm water
- ½ recipe Molasses-Gingerbread Cookie Dough (page 24)
- Royal Icing (page 24)
- Fluffy Vanilla Frosting (recipe below)

1. Preheat oven to 350°. Line mini muffin tins with foil liners. With an electric mixer on medium speed, whisk together flour, cocoa, sugar, baking soda, baking powder, and salt. Reduce speed to low. Add eggs, buttermilk, oil, vanilla, and the warm water; beat until smooth and combined, scraping down sides of bowl as needed.

2. Divide batter evenly among lined cups, filling each about two-thirds full. Bake, rotating tins halfway through, until a cake tester inserted in centers comes out clean, about 16 minutes. Transfer tins to wire racks to cool 10 minutes; turn out cupcakes onto racks to cool completely. Cupcakes can be stored overnight at room temperature, or frozen up to 2 months, in airtight containers.

3. Fill a pastry bag fitted with a small plain tip (such as #2) with royal icing; pipe decorations on cookie cutouts. For snowflake, pipe lines and dots radiating out each point. For people, pipe three dots down the middle, for buttons.

4. Use an offset spatula to spread cupcakes with a smooth layer of frosting. Place a cookie cutout upright on each cupcake; serve.

Fluffy Vanilla Frosting

MAKES ABOUT 4 CUPS

- 1½ cups (3 sticks) unsalted butter, softened
- 4 cups (1 pound) confectioners' sugar, sifted
- ½ teaspoon pure vanilla extract

1. With an electric mixer on medium-high speed, beat butter until pale and creamy. Reduce speed to medium. Add confectioners' sugar, ½ cup at a time, beating well after each addition and scraping down sides of bowl as needed; after every two additions, raise speed to high and beat 10 seconds to aerate frosting. Frosting will be very pale and fluffy. Add vanilla; beat until smooth.

2. If not using immediately, frosting can be refrigerated up to 10 days in an airtight container. Before using, bring to room temperature; beat on low speed until smooth again.

create a festive finale

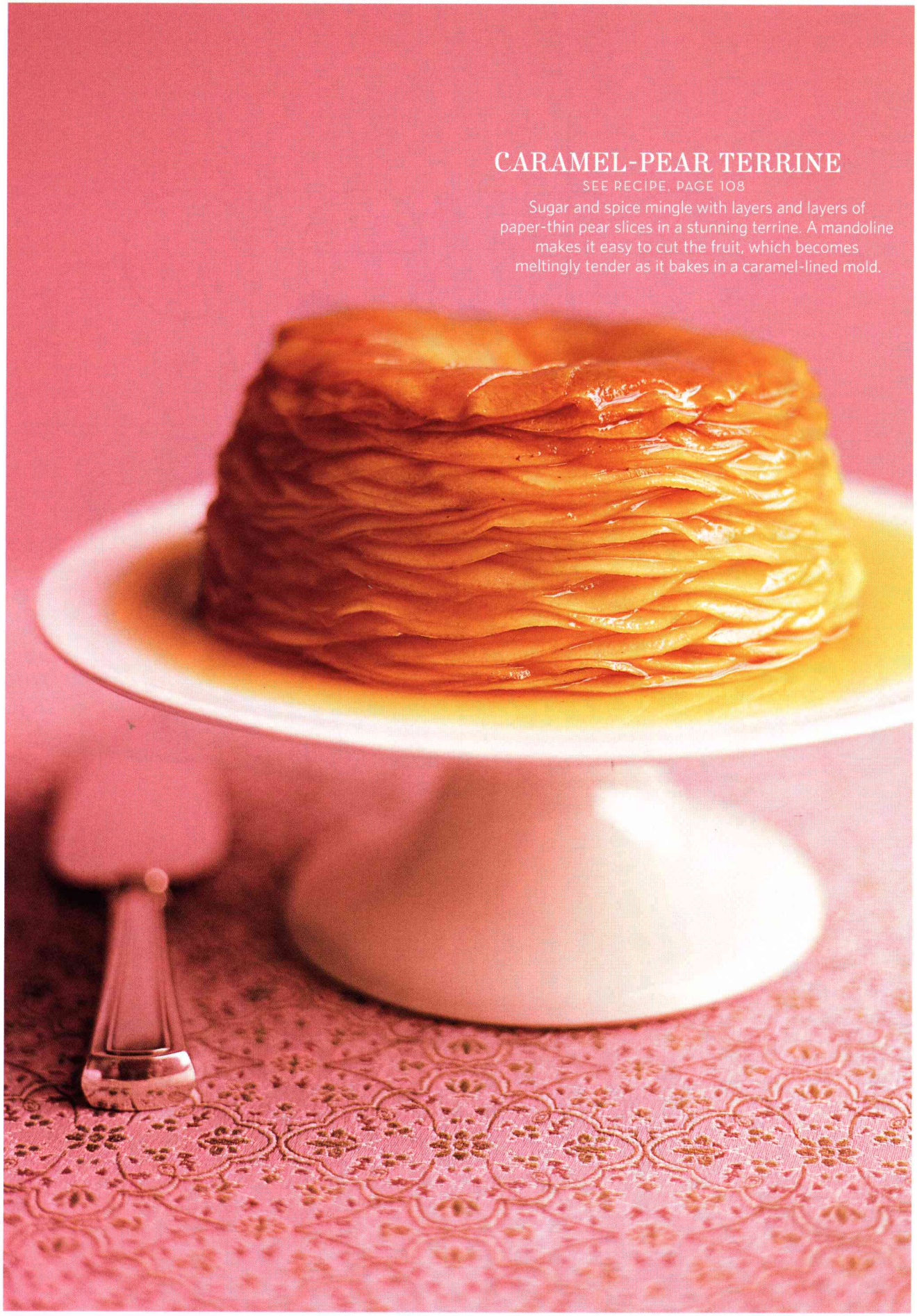
AFTER THE WHIRLWIND OF BAKING and gift-giving (among other activities), there is still cause to pull out all the stops. A celebratory meal, whether shared with family, friends, or both, warrants a spectacular finale. For such an occasion, consider ethereal meringue: Once you whisk egg whites and sugar to a billowy consistency, you can bake it into layers in a dacquoise (see opposite), or pipe starbursts over an ice-cream bombe to produce baked Alaska. Or whip up one of our whimsical woodland-inspired cakes. A many-layered pear terrine—and its accompanying caramel sauce—is also truly memorable, and will commemorate this once-a-year time of reflection and rejoicing.

PISTACHIO DACQUOISE

SEE RECIPE, PAGE 108

Crisp pistachio-studded meringue, satiny pastry cream, and tart raspberry puree meld into a multi-textured and flavor-rich dessert. As if that weren't enough, the lofty dacquoise is topped off with whipped cream, fresh raspberries, and a dusting of finely ground pistachios.

LAURIE FRANKEL (OPPOSITE)



CARAMEL-PEAR TERRINE

SEE RECIPE, PAGE 108

Sugar and spice mingle with layers and layers of paper-thin pear slices in a stunning terrine. A mandoline makes it easy to cut the fruit, which becomes meltingly tender as it bakes in a caramel-lined mold.

CON POULOS

PINECONE CAKES

SEE RECIPE, PAGE 109

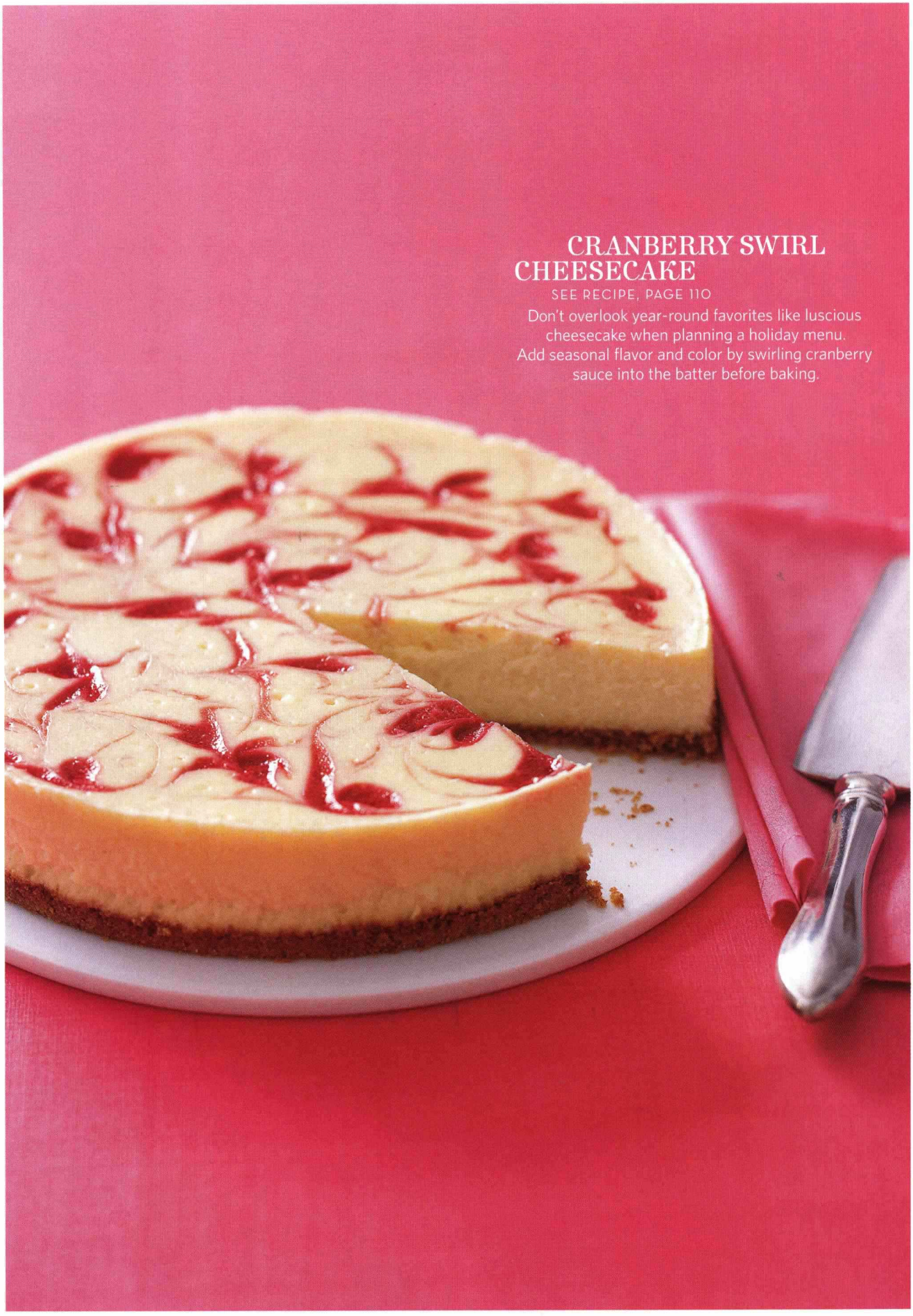
They may look just like the ones found in nature, but these pinecones are completely edible, and downright charming. To make them, an almond cake is cut into small oval shapes. The cones are then covered with chocolate frosting, topped with sliced-almond "scales," and finished with shaved chocolate "needles."

GRASSHOPPER TARTS

SEE RECIPE, PAGE 109

The famously retro cocktail made with crème de menthe becomes a thoroughly modern dessert in the form of individual tarts. Each treat consists of a chocolate-cookie crust topped with mint-flavored mousse. It's a spirited option for a New Year's Eve fête.

ANNA WILLIAMS

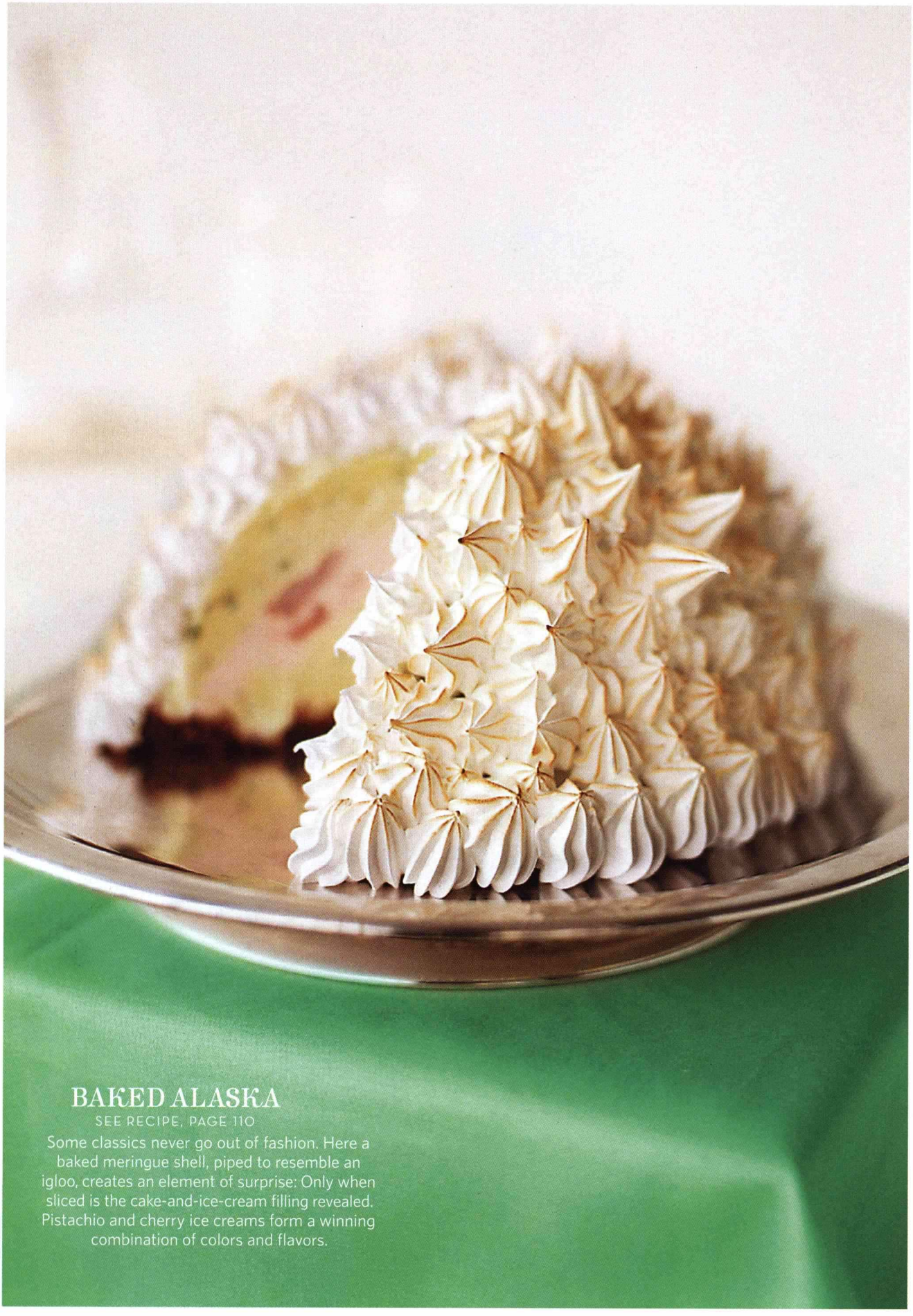


CRANBERRY SWIRL CHEESECAKE

SEE RECIPE, PAGE 110

Don't overlook year-round favorites like luscious cheesecake when planning a holiday menu. Add seasonal flavor and color by swirling cranberry sauce into the batter before baking.

SANG AN



BAKED ALASKA

SEE RECIPE, PAGE 110

Some classics never go out of fashion. Here a baked meringue shell, piped to resemble an igloo, creates an element of surprise: Only when sliced is the cake-and-ice-cream filling revealed. Pistachio and cherry ice creams form a winning combination of colors and flavors.

VICTORIA PEARSON

Try your hand at one of these showstoppers for dessert. Your guests will appreciate it, and you'll have so much fun putting it together. –MARTHA

FROSTED FRUITCAKE WITH MERINGUE MUSHROOMS

SEE RECIPE, PAGE 111

Blanketed with snowy frosting covered with a bunch of sprouting meringue mushrooms, fruitcake is transformed into something elegant. The mushrooms garnish another centerpiece-worthy creation, the bûche de Noël on page 55.

SANG AN

create a festive finale

PISTACHIO DACQUOISE

SERVES 8

For best results, make meringues on a day when humidity is low. Also, if you overwork the beaten egg whites, there's a good chance the meringues will fall as they bake. Prepare the components ahead of time, and assemble and freeze the dacquoise before dinner—it'll be ready in time for dessert.

- 1 cup roasted, salted shelled pistachios (4 ounces)
- ½ cup confectioners' sugar
- 6 large egg whites
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- Pinch of salt
- Pinch of cream of tartar
- 2 cups raspberries (about 9 ounces)
- Pastry Cream Filling (recipe follows)
- 1½ cups cold heavy cream

1. Preheat oven to 200°, with racks in upper and lower positions. Rub nuts in a towel to remove skins. Coarsely chop nuts; transfer to a sieve, and gently shake over a paper towel (reserve powder for garnish, if desired). Draw three 8-inch rounds on two pieces of parchment paper; place, marked sides down, on two baking sheets.

2. Stir together nuts and confectioners' sugar in a small bowl.

3. In a heatproof mixing bowl set over (not in) a pan of simmering water, combine egg whites, granulated sugar, salt, and cream of tartar. Whisk until sugar is dissolved and whites are warm to the touch, about 3 minutes. Remove bowl from heat. With an electric mixer on medium speed, whisk until soft peaks form. Raise speed to high, and continue beating until stiff, glossy peaks form.

4. Gently fold pistachio mixture into egg-white mixture. With an offset spatula, spread one-third of the meringue onto each parchment circle (see how-to, below left).

5. Bake, rotating sheets halfway through, 1 hour; reduce oven to 175°. Bake, rotating sheets after an additional 45 minutes, until meringues are dry and crisp and can be lifted easily from parchment (but are still white), 1 to 2 hours. Turn off oven; let meringues cool in oven 45 minutes before removing. Let cool completely on sheets. Meringues can be stored up to 1 day at room temperature in airtight containers.

6. Puree ⅔ cup raspberries in a food processor. Pass through a fine sieve into a bowl; discard seeds. (Puree can be refrigerated up to 1 day in an airtight container.) With an electric mixer, beat pastry cream until smooth. Beat ½ cup heavy cream with clean mixer to soft peaks; gently fold into pastry cream.

7. Reserve several berries for garnish. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Put one meringue on sheet; spread half of pastry-cream mixture on top. Spoon 4 to 5 teaspoons puree in a spiral over pastry cream; swirl with a knife (see how-to, below right). Top with another meringue. Scatter remaining berries over meringue; spread remaining pastry cream on top, leaving a 1½-inch border. Spoon remaining puree in a spiral over pastry cream; swirl with a knife. Top with last meringue; gently press to spread filling almost to edges. Freeze until filling is solid but not completely frozen, 2 to 3 hours.

8. With electric mixer, beat remaining 1 cup heavy cream until soft peaks form. Top dacquoise with whipped cream; garnish with reserved berries, and sprinkle with reserved pistachio powder, if desired. To serve, use a serrated knife to cut into wedges; wipe blade clean between cuts.

Pastry Cream Filling

MAKES ABOUT 1¾ CUPS

- ½ cup sugar
- 2 large egg yolks
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ¼ cup cornstarch
- 2 cups milk

1. Whisk together ¼ cup sugar, the yolks, and salt in a medium bowl. Whisk in cornstarch, 1 tablespoon at a time.

2. Bring milk and remaining ¼ cup sugar to a simmer in a medium saucepan over medium heat. Whisk a little milk mixture into egg-yolk mixture; whisking constantly, gradually add remaining milk mixture. Pour mixture into pan; bring to a boil, whisking constantly.

3. Cook, whisking, until very thick, 2 to 3 minutes. Pass through a fine sieve into a bowl; discard solids. Cover with plastic wrap, pressing it directly onto surface to keep a skin from forming. Refrigerate until completely chilled, at least 1 hour, or up to 3 days.

CARAMEL-PEAR TERRINE

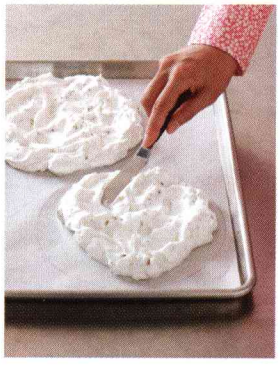
SERVES 6 TO 8

Grate star anise using a Microplane zester or the finest holes on a box grater. Avoid preground star anise, which has a less intense flavor. If you don't have a charlotte mold (see the Guide), use a six-inch cake pan that's three inches deep; the baking time remains the same (see how-to, opposite).

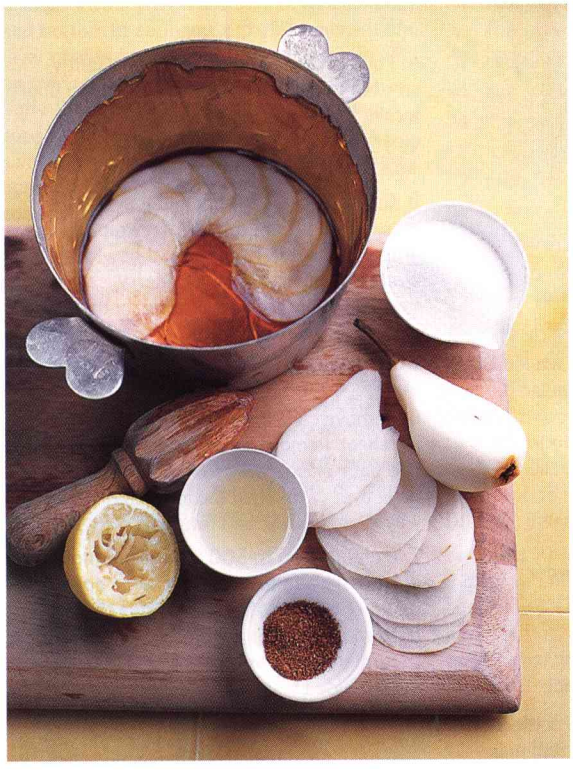
- ¼ cup water
- 1 cup sugar
- ½ teaspoon finely grated star anise (from 2 whole)
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 2 teaspoons fresh lemon juice
- 4 to 5 pounds ripe, firm Bartlett pears (10 to 12 pears)

MAKING THE DACQUOISE

Use a light hand when spreading the meringue mixture, and work quickly to avoid deflating it. Spread to an even thickness, but do not smooth the top, as the peaks are characteristic of the classic French dessert. Once layers are baked and cooled, spread pastry cream on top, then drizzle raspberry puree in a spiral. Run a sharp knife through the puree at even intervals (four strokes total), across the diameter.



CHARLES SCHILLER



MAKING THE PEAR TERRINE

When arranging pear slices, alternate directions to lend structure to the dessert. Place them in a counterclockwise direction for one layer, then switch to clockwise for the next; repeat. The mold is lined with caramel, which melts in the oven and seeps into the layers to help them adhere. When the terrine is unmolded, the caramel spills out around it (use a rimmed dish). The caramel is then boiled until thickened, and served alongside.

1. Preheat oven to 250°. Bring the water and ¾ cup sugar to a simmer in a small saucepan over medium-high heat, stirring until sugar dissolves. Stop stirring. Cook, swirling pan occasionally, until mixture turns dark amber. Pour caramel into a 6½-inch charlotte mold that's 3½ inches deep, swirling mold to coat bottom and sides. (Caramel may crack as it cools.)

2. Place grated star anise in a small bowl. Combine salt and remaining ¼ cup sugar in another small bowl. Place lemon juice in a third small bowl.

3. Peel 3 pears. Using a mandoline (or a handheld slicer), slice each pear lengthwise ⅛ inch thick, stopping at the core and turning over to slice the opposite half.

4. Arrange one layer of pear slices in a tight, overlapping circle in mold, working counterclockwise and leaving center open (see how-to, above left). Brush lightly with lemon juice, and sprinkle with 1 teaspoon sugar mixture. Arrange next layer in a tight, overlapping circle, working clockwise to cover previous layer. Sprinkle with 1 teaspoon sugar mixture and a pinch of star anise. Repeat peeling, slicing, and layering with remaining pears. Continue to switch directions, alternating lemon juice and star anise. Leave ½ inch of space at top of mold.

5. Cover mold with aluminum foil. Place in a large roasting pan, and transfer to oven. Carefully pour boiling water into pan to come halfway up sides of mold. Bake until a cake tester inserted in the middle meets no resistance, 1¼ to 1½ hours. Transfer to a wire rack to cool, uncovered, 10 minutes.

6. Place a rimmed plate or pie plate over mold, and quickly invert. Carefully lift to remove mold (see above right). Using two spatulas, transfer terrine to a cake stand or serving plate, reserving sauce in dish.

7. Pour sauce into a small saucepan; boil until slightly thickened, about 5 minutes. Let cool. Slice terrine with a sharp knife; serve warm with sauce alongside.

GRASSHOPPER TARTS

MAKES 6 INDIVIDUAL TARTS

Use a Y-shaped vegetable peeler, or a sharp paring knife, to make the chocolate shavings from a block of chocolate.

- ¾ cup sugar
- ½ cup water
- 3 tablespoons plus 1½ teaspoons crème de menthe
- ¼ teaspoon pure spearmint extract
- 1 teaspoon unflavored gelatin
- 2½ cups heavy cream
- 2 cups loosely packed fresh mint leaves, plus 6 sprigs for garnish
- 1 large whole egg plus 5 egg yolks
- 3 ounces semisweet chocolate, finely chopped
- Chocolate-Wafer Crusts (recipe follows)
- Chocolate shavings, for garnish

1. Combine sugar and the water in a small saucepan over medium-high heat; stir until sugar is dissolved. Remove from heat; let cool slightly. Stir in crème de menthe and spearmint extract. Sprinkle gelatin over top; let soften, about 5 minutes.

2. Heat 1½ cups cream in another saucepan until it is almost at a boil. Turn off heat, and add mint leaves; cover, and let steep 10 minutes.

3. Prepare an ice-water bath. Whisk whole egg and yolks in a heatproof bowl. Pass cream mixture through a fine sieve into egg mixture (discard solids); place bowl over (not in) a pan of simmering water. Add gelatin mixture, and whisk constantly until mixture begins to thicken and registers 160° on a candy thermometer. Transfer bowl to ice bath; stir occasionally until mixture is cool.

4. In a medium bowl, with an electric mixer, whisk remaining 1 cup cream until soft peaks form. Gently whisk in egg mixture, and fold in chopped chocolate. Spoon onto crusts in ring molds, dividing evenly. Chill until set, at least 2 hours.

5. To serve, unmold tarts: Warm each ring in your hands, and shake gently until tart slides out onto serving dish. Garnish with chocolate shavings and a sprig of mint.

Chocolate-Wafer Crusts

MAKES ENOUGH FOR 6 INDIVIDUAL TARTS

- 35 chocolate wafers (about 7½ ounces)
- 3 tablespoons sugar
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted

1. Preheat oven to 350°. Process chocolate wafers in a food processor until fine crumbs form. Add sugar and butter, and process until combined.

2. Place six 2¾-by-2-inch ring molds on a rimmed baking sheet. Pat 5 to 6 tablespoons crumb mixture into each, pressing onto bottom and halfway up sides. Bake until crusts are fragrant, about 8 minutes. Transfer to a wire rack to cool completely before filling. Store, covered with plastic wrap, up to 1 day at room temperature.

PINECONE CAKES

MAKES EIGHT 3-INCH CAKES

- 10 tablespoons (1¼ sticks) unsalted butter, plus more for pan
- 1 cup whole blanched almonds (4 ounces)
- 1½ cups granulated sugar
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 2 tablespoons dark rum
- 2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract
- 8 large egg whites, room temperature
- Pinch of salt
- Chocolate Frosting (recipe follows)
- 6 cups sliced almonds (about 1½ pounds)
- 4 ounces bittersweet chocolate, finely chopped
- Confectioners' sugar, for dusting (optional)

CON POULOS

MAKING THE PINECONE CAKES

With an oval cookie cutter (or a paring knife), cut eight ovals from the cake. Trim ovals to resemble pinecones, creating a pointed tip on one end and rounding off corners and top (near right). Once cakes are frosted, arrange sliced almonds to look like the scales of a pinecone: Starting at the base, set almond slices at an angle and, with pointy ends facing outward, in a spiral pattern. Decorate row by row, overlapping slices slightly. Cover entire surface (far right).

1. Preheat oven to 350°. Butter a 10-inch round cake pan; line bottom with parchment paper. Butter parchment. Spread whole almonds in a single layer on a rimmed baking sheet; toast in oven, tossing occasionally, until light golden and fragrant, 7 to 10 minutes. Let cool.

2. Place toasted almonds and ¾ cup sugar in a food processor; pulse until finely ground. Transfer to a bowl, and stir in flour. Melt butter in a small saucepan; remove from heat. Stir in rum and vanilla. Let cool slightly.

3. With an electric mixer on medium speed, whisk together the egg whites and salt until soft peaks form. Gradually beat in the remaining ¾ cup sugar. Raise speed to high, and continue beating until stiff, glossy peaks form.

4. Fold flour mixture into the egg-white mixture in three batches, alternating with two additions of butter mixture. Pour batter into prepared pan; smooth the top with an offset spatula. Bake until cake is golden brown and firm to the touch, about 40 minutes. Transfer pan to a wire rack to cool 20 minutes, then turn out cake onto rack to cool completely, top side up.

5. Using a 3-inch oval cookie cutter, cut out eight shapes from cake (discard scraps). Trim each to resemble a pinecone, with a rounded base and a pointed tip (see above left). Leaving bottom unfrosted, spread about ⅓ cup frosting over each to create a smooth, rounded dome shape.

6. Starting at the base of one cake, arrange sliced almonds in a spiral, overlapping slightly. Continue arranging almonds in closely set rows to cover the entire surface (see above right). Transfer finished cake to a baking sheet and place in the refrigerator to set; repeat with remaining cakes.

7. Place chocolate in a heatproof bowl set over (not in) a pan of simmering water, stirring until melted and smooth. Gently spread melted chocolate ⅛ inch thick on a parchment-lined baking sheet. Chill until cold, 10 to 15 minutes. Scrape with a bench scraper to form thin "needles." Chill until ready to serve.

8. Just before serving, dust the cakes with confectioners' sugar and garnish with chocolate shavings.

Chocolate Frosting

MAKES ABOUT 3 CUPS

- 3½ cups confectioners' sugar
- 1 cup unsweetened cocoa powder
- ¾ cup (1½ sticks) unsalted butter, softened
- ½ cup milk, room temperature
- 2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract

Into a medium bowl, sift together confectioners' sugar and cocoa. Whisk in butter, milk, and vanilla until smooth. If not using immediately, refrigerate, covered, up to 3 days. Bring to room temperature before using.

BAKED ALASKA

SERVES 6 TO 8

- 3 ounces bittersweet chocolate, finely chopped
- 6 tablespoons sugar
- 3 large eggs, separated, room temperature
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- Pinch of salt
- 1½ pints pistachio ice cream, slightly softened
- 1½ pints cherry or strawberry ice cream or berry sorbet, slightly softened
- 1 recipe Swiss Meringue (page 61)
- Vegetable-oil cooking spray

1. Preheat oven to 350°. Coat an 8-inch round cake pan with cooking spray. Line bottom with parchment paper, and spray parchment. Melt chocolate in a heatproof bowl set over (not in) a pan of simmering water, stirring until smooth. Let cool.

2. With an electric mixer on medium speed, whisk 3 tablespoons sugar and the yolks until pale and thick, about 15 minutes. Add vanilla, and fold in melted chocolate just to combine.

3. Combine the egg whites and pinch of salt in another mixing bowl. With a clean electric mixer on medium speed, whisk until frothy. Add remaining 3 tablespoons sugar; beat until stiff peaks form. Fold the egg-white mixture into the chocolate mixture.

4. Pour batter into prepared pan. Gently smooth top with an offset spatula. Bake until a cake tester inserted in center comes out clean, about 20 minutes. Transfer pan to a wire rack to cool completely.

5. Coat a 5-cup-capacity metal bowl with cooking spray; line with plastic wrap, leaving ample overhang. Pack base of bowl with pistachio ice cream; layer cherry ice cream over pistachio, then finish with another layer of pistachio. Pack firmly, cover with plastic wrap, and freeze until ice cream is very hard, at least 2 hours, or up to 1 day.

6. Remove cake from pan and place on a baking sheet. Remove ice cream from the freezer; fold back plastic wrap from surface, and invert bowl over cake. Keep the ice cream covered with plastic wrap, and return to freezer.

7. Preheat oven to 500°. Place meringue in a pastry bag fitted with a large open-star tip (such as Ateco #826); starting at the bottom and working all the way around the circumference of assembled cake, pipe starbursts, side by side, until cake and ice cream are completely covered. (Alternatively, spoon meringue over ice cream, and smooth with an offset spatula.) If ice cream starts to soften, return to freezer 15 minutes.

8. Place in oven, and bake until meringue just starts to brown, 1 to 2 minutes. Serve immediately, slicing into wedges with a sharp knife (wipe blade clean after each).

CRANBERRY SWIRL CHEESECAKE

SERVES 8 TO 10

To avoid cracks in a finished baked cheesecake, start with the ingredients at room temperature; don't overmix the eggs, and don't overbake.

- 1 cup finely ground graham crackers (5 ounces; about 8 sheets)
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted
- 1½ cups plus 5 tablespoons sugar
- 6 ounces cranberries (about 1½ cups)
- 2 pounds cream cheese, softened
- Pinch of salt
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- 4 large eggs, room temperature
- Boiling water, for roasting pan

1. Preheat oven to 350°. Stir together graham-cracker crumbs, melted butter, and 2 tablespoons sugar in a medium bowl. Press crumb mixture firmly into bottom of pan. Bake until set, about 10 minutes. Transfer pan to a wire rack and remove ring from pan; let cool. Reduce oven to 325°.

2. Puree cranberries in a food processor. Pass puree through a fine sieve into a small bowl; discard solids. Whisk in 3 tablespoons sugar.

SANG AN

3. Replace ring on springform pan. Wrap sides and bottom of springform pan in a double layer of aluminum foil. With an electric mixer on medium speed, beat cream cheese until fluffy. Reduce speed to low; add remaining 1½ cups sugar in a slow, steady stream. Add the salt and vanilla; mix until well combined. Add eggs, one at a time, mixing each until just combined (do not overmix). Pour cream-cheese filling over crust. Drop cranberry sauce by the teaspoon on top. With a wooden skewer or toothpick, swirl sauce into filling (see below).

4. Set springform in a roasting pan. Transfer to oven. Carefully pour boiling water into roasting pan to come halfway up sides of springform. Bake until cake is set but still slightly wobbly in center, about 70 minutes.

5. Transfer pan to a wire rack to cool completely. Refrigerate, uncovered, 6 hours, or up to overnight. Before unmolding, run a knife around edge of cake.

FROSTED FRUITCAKE WITH MERINGUE MUSHROOMS

SERVES 8 TO 10

- 8 ounces unblanched hazelnuts (about 2 cups)
- 8 ounces dried apricots, cut into ¼-inch pieces (about 1⅓ cups)
- 8 ounces dried figs, cut into ¼-inch pieces (about 1½ cups)
- 8 ounces dates, pitted and cut into ¼-inch pieces (about 1¼ cups)
- ¼ cup Frangelico or other hazelnut-flavored liqueur
- ¾ cup all-purpose flour
- 1½ teaspoons baking powder
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened
- ½ cup packed light-brown sugar
- ¼ cup granulated sugar
- 3 large eggs
- 2 tablespoons honey
- 1½ teaspoons pure vanilla extract
- Seven-Minute Frosting (recipe follows)
- Meringue Mushrooms (recipe, page 61; how-to, page 60)
- Vegetable-oil cooking spray

1. Preheat oven to 250°. Spread hazelnuts on a rimmed baking sheet. Toast in oven, stirring halfway through, until fragrant and skins begin to crack, about 20 minutes. Remove from oven. While nuts are still hot, place in a kitchen towel; rub to remove skins (some may remain). Let cool. Raise oven to 300°.

2. Coat a 10-inch springform pan with cooking spray. Line bottom with parchment paper, and spray parchment. In a medium bowl, toss apricots, figs, and dates with liqueur. In another bowl, whisk together flour, baking powder, and salt.

3. With an electric mixer on medium speed, cream butter and both sugars until light and fluffy. Add the eggs, one at a time, beating after each until incorporated. Beat in honey and vanilla. Add flour mixture, and beat until mixture is just combined. Stir in dried fruit mixture and hazelnuts.

4. Spread batter in prepared pan, and bake until a cake tester inserted in center comes out clean, about 1¼ hours; if cake starts to brown too quickly, cover loosely with aluminum foil. Transfer pan to a wire rack to cool 30 minutes. Remove ring from pan, and let cake cool completely.

5. Using an offset spatula, spread frosting over cake, smoothing top and creating swirls on sides. Top with meringue mushrooms.

Seven-Minute Frosting

MAKES 5½ CUPS

- ¾ cup plus 2 tablespoons sugar
- 2 tablespoons water
- 1 tablespoon light corn syrup
- 3 large egg whites, room temperature

1. In a small heavy saucepan, heat ¾ cup sugar with the water and corn syrup over medium heat, and cook, stirring occasionally, until the sugar has dissolved, about 4 minutes. (Rub mixture between your fingers, making sure any graininess has disappeared.) Raise heat, and bring to a boil without stirring. Continue boiling, occasionally washing down sides of pan with a wet pastry brush to prevent crystals from forming, until mixture registers 230° on a candy thermometer, about 5 minutes. (Depending on the humidity, this can take 4 to 10 minutes.) Remove from heat.

2. Meanwhile, with an electric mixer on medium speed, whisk the egg whites until soft peaks form. Gradually add remaining 2 tablespoons sugar.

3. Raise speed to medium-low, and pour hot syrup in a steady stream down side of bowl. Raise speed to high; beat until completely cool, about 7 minutes. Frosting should be thick and shiny. Use immediately.

SWIRLING THE CHEESECAKE

Drop dollops of fruit puree onto the batter with a teaspoon, then use a wooden skewer or toothpick to form tendrils of sauce, dragging the tip in several directions each time.

SANG AN

mix & match

With so many spectacular holiday sweets to choose from, why make just one? Instead, prepare a bunch, and invite guests over for a festive dessert buffet.

SHERRY TRIFLE WITH BRANDY CUSTARD PAGE 71

CHOCOLATE-ORANGE PEANUT BARK PAGE 78

CHOCOLATE-MACADAMIA NUT TART PAGE 88

A multitiered tray showcases little treats in a grand way. Here, three cake stands in graduating sizes are stacked and then topped with a footed compote. Each stand is lined with pink waxed tissue paper cut to fit (as are two of the glasses holding mints and flatware), for an easy and inexpensive color accent.

LAURIE FRANKEL

dessert buffet tips and strategies

A successful dessert buffet offers a variety of flavors, textures, colors, and even shapes. This not only creates an interesting display, but allows you to include something that appeals to every guest. Figure that each pie, tart, or cake serves eight to twelve, and that some people may only sample two or three desserts while others may prefer to take a small piece of everything.

planning tips

• Choose items that can sit out at room temperature. This eliminates frozen desserts, unless they can be replenished as needed. Any dessert intended to be served warm from the oven, or immediately after being assembled, isn't practical.

• Guests should be able to serve themselves. Pies, tarts, and simple cakes are always good options, as are "spoon desserts," such as trifles and bread puddings. Cookies, candies, and other bite-size treats are easiest of all.

• Select desserts that can be prepared (entirely or partially) ahead. Pie, tart, and cookie doughs can be frozen a month or so in advance, as can certain cakes, including the génoise on page 60 and the cupcakes (without frosting) on page 99 (both thaw very quickly). Many cookies and candies can be made up to a week ahead.

• Be sure to have something chocolate on the table, since it's a universal favorite and nicely complements other flavors, especially the fruits and nuts of the season.

• Consider filling out the buffet with store-bought items, such as the candy mints shown on page 112.

serving tips

• Use an interesting variety of serving dishes, including those of different heights. Cake stands and footed bowls and compotes hold all types of desserts; stack them to create a tiered display of smaller items like cookies, candies, and cupcakes.

• Establish a color palette. In the pink-and-white setting shown on pages 112 and 113, white platters lined with pink paper are mixed with platters, compotes, and rimmed bowls in several shades of pink. Floral-motif serving plates and table linens continue the theme.

• Place all serving pieces, including plates and flatware, in an easily accessible spot. Set the correct knife or other serving utensil next to each dessert.

other suggested dessert buffets

THANKSGIVING DESSERT TABLE After a hearty meal of turkey and all the trimmings, the desserts should stand up in terms of flavor, but you don't want anything too rich or too filling. One or two pies or tarts, a cake or pudding, and a platter of cookies is a good place to start.

- spiced apple pie or pear-cranberry pie
- "pumpkin pie" cheesecake or acorn-squash pie
- hazelnut-dried fruit biscotti or white-chocolate clusters

HOLIDAY DESSERT PARTY Having a wealth of offerings will set a fun, celebratory tone. Anchor the buffet with two or three main desserts, such as pies, tarts, and cakes, and supplement with little nibbles.

- gingerbread linzertorte
- chocolate-pecan pie
- inside-out Black Forest cake
- caramel pots de crème
- chocolate-dipped coconut macaroon trees
- lemon-oatmeal lacies
- chocolate mint wafers
- rugelach

HOLIDAY OPEN HOUSE At an open house, guests are invited to drop by at any time over the course of the party, and with varying appetites. Offer a range of sweets, some more substantial than others, to suit all needs.

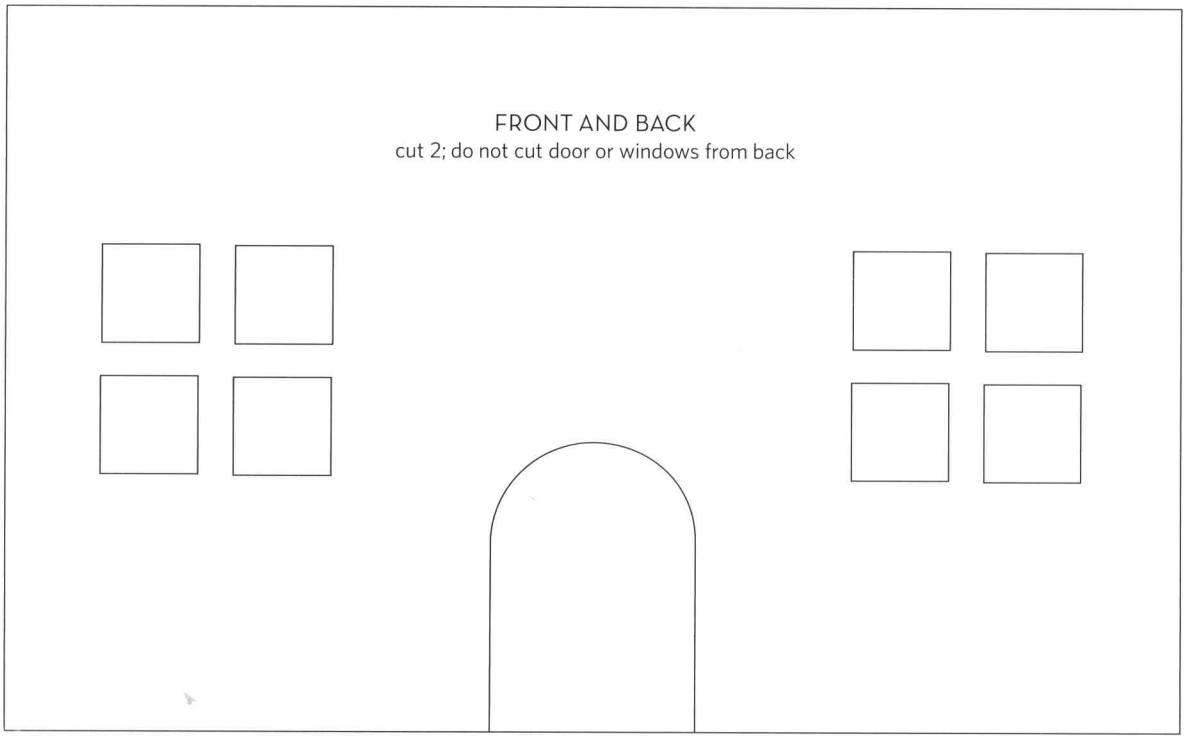
- citrus tart
- bûche de Noël or peppermint Yule log
- pear tart with almond crust
- chocolate-caramel tartlets
- Greek almond-anise cookies
- black-and-white cheesecake bars
- chocolate almond spirals
- assorted pralines

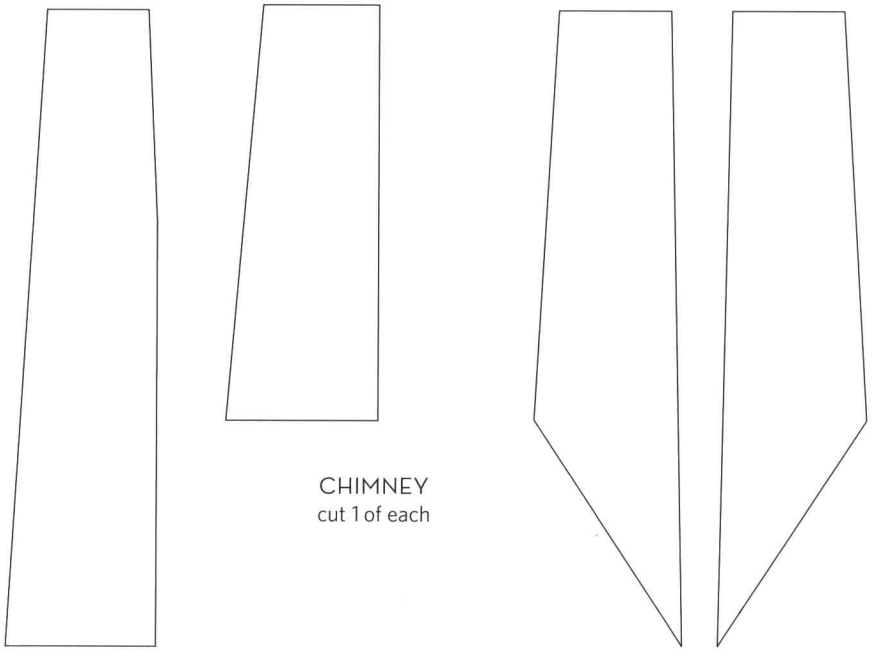
LAURIE FRANKEL

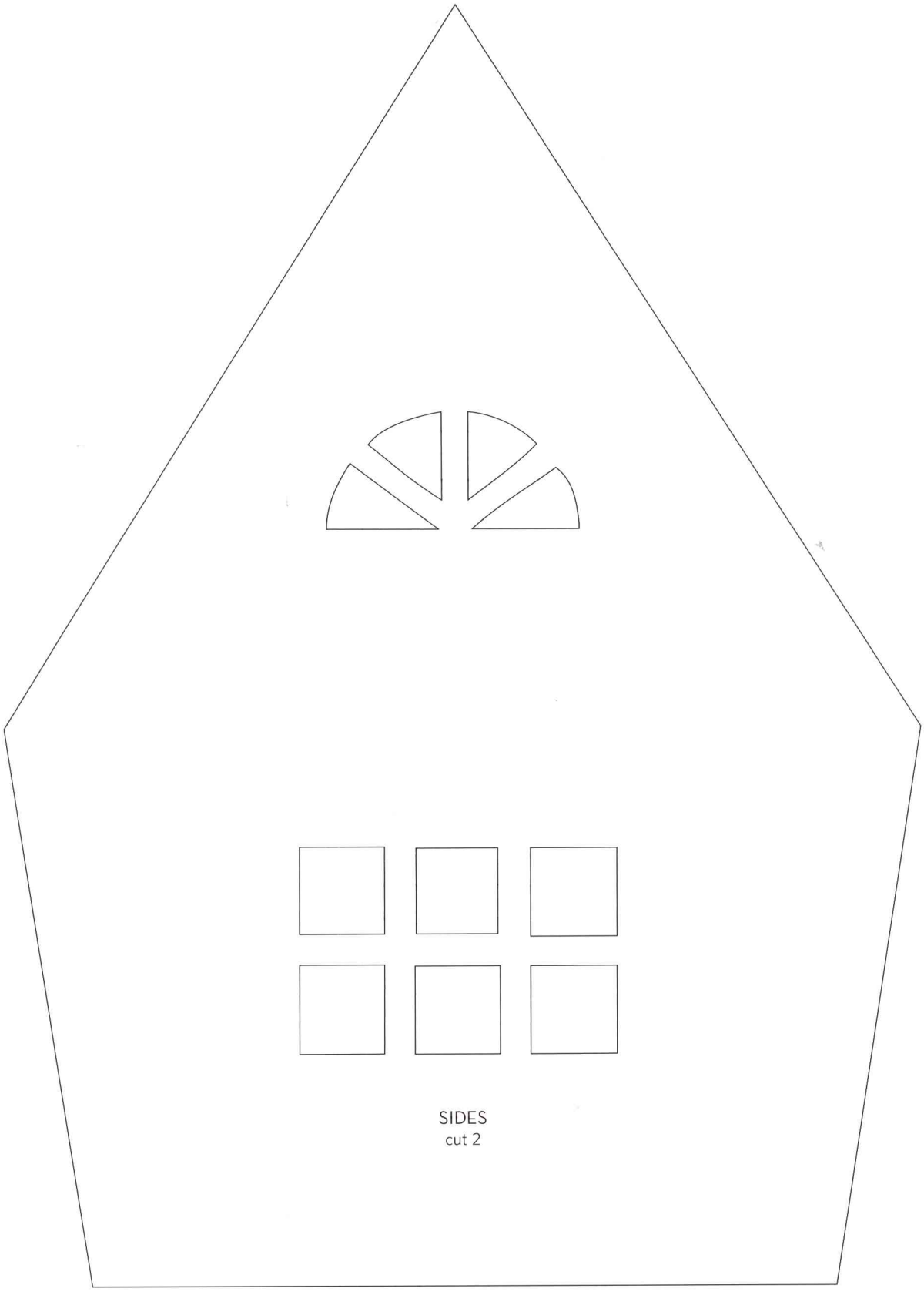
templates and clip art

You can photocopy the templates and clip art from these pages, or download and print them directly from marthastewart.com/holiday-sweets-templates.

SWEDISH GINGERBREAD HOUSE, PAGE 19
Photocopy at 100%



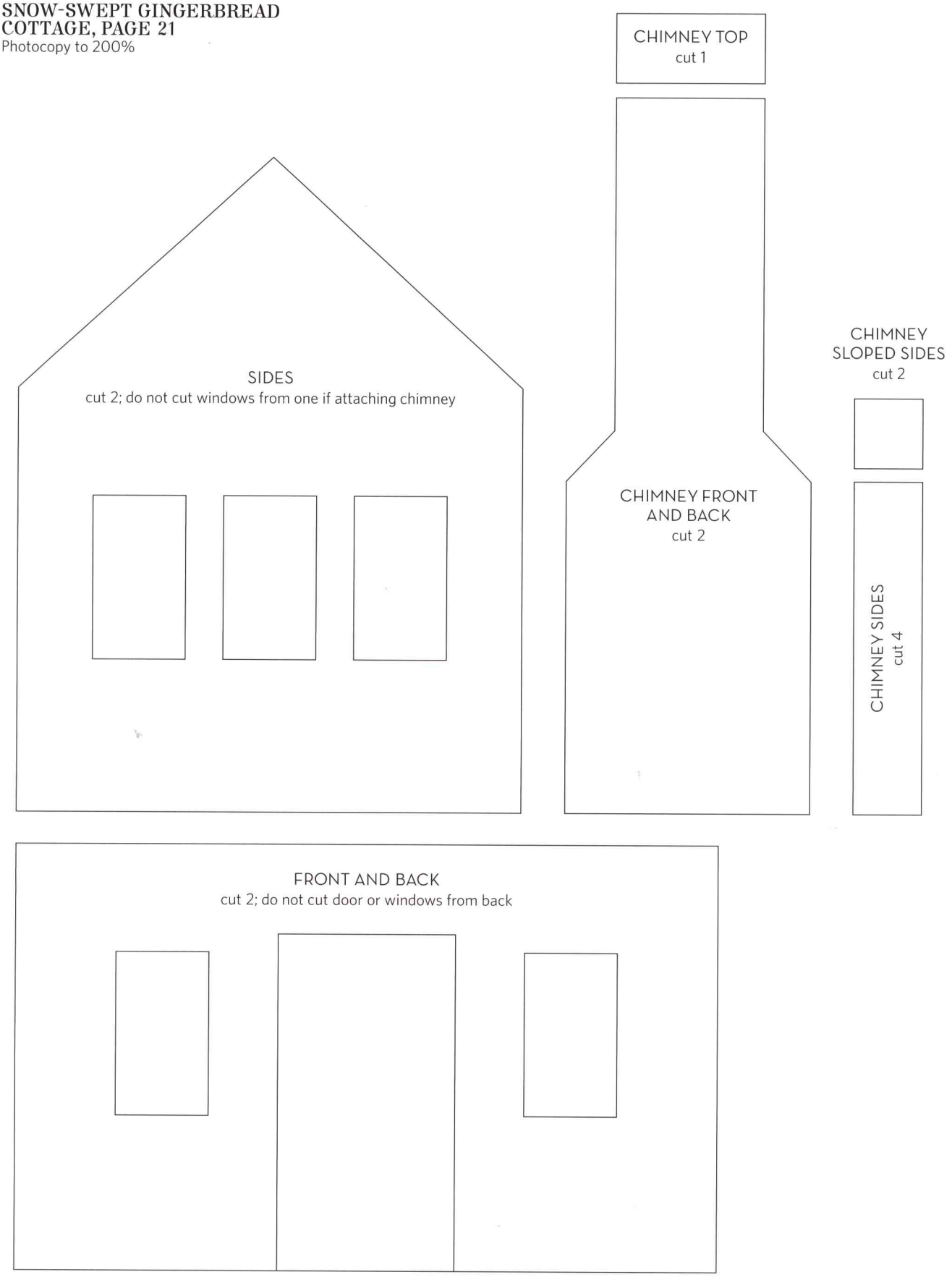


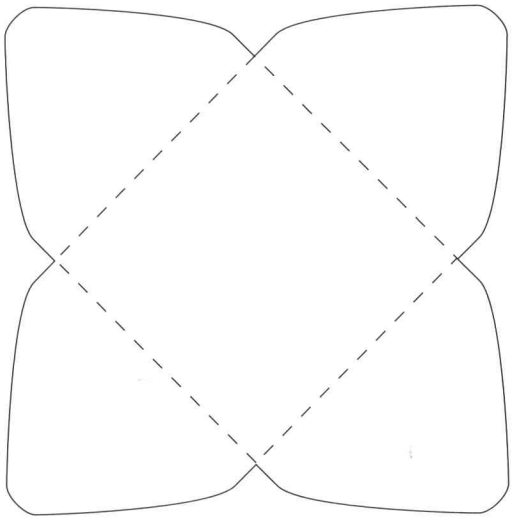


SIDES
cut 2

SNOW-SWEPT GINGERBREAD COTTAGE, PAGE 21

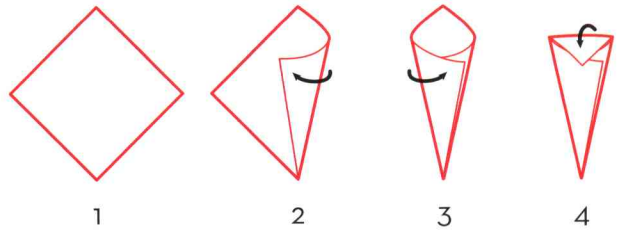
Photocopy to 200%





SINGLE-SERVING SWEETS, PAGE 47

Photocopy envelope template (above left) to 200%. Cut out template, and trace onto waxed tissue and decorative paper. Cut out envelopes, fold both along dotted lines, and place waxed tissue in decorative paper. Place cookie inside. To close, wrap with a ribbon or paper band, and tape at back. To add a snowflake label, color-photocopy clip art (above right) at 100%, cut out, and affix to front of envelope with double-sided tape.



GINGERBREAD CARAMELS, PAGE 77

Color-photocopy the label (above left) to desired size. Follow the diagram (above right) to create a cone from construction paper, then fill with caramels. Affix the label (and a paper ribbon, if desired) with double-sided tape.

ELVIS SWIFT (BOTTOM LEFT)